TEN TOP BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY DISCOVERIES



Ten Top Biblical Archaeology Discoveries

Production and Design Staff:

Joey Corbett – Editor

Robert Bronder – Designer

Susan Laden – Publisher

Biblical Archaeology Society
4710 41st Street, NW
Washington, DC 20016
www.biblicalarchaeology.org

About the Biblical Archaeology Society

The excitement of archaeology and the latest in Bible scholarship since 1974

The Biblical Archaeology Society (**BAS**) was founded in 1974 as a nonprofit, nondenominational, educational organization dedicated to the dissemination of information about archaeology in the Bible lands.

BAS educates the public about archaeology and the Bible through its bi-monthly magazine, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, an award-winning Web site (www.biblicalarchaeology.org), books and multimedia products (DVDs, CD-ROMs and videos), tours and seminars. Our readers rely on us to present the latest that scholarship has to offer in a fair and accessible manner. **BAS** serves as an important authority and as an invaluable source of reliable information.

Publishing Excellence

BAS's flagship publication is *Biblical Archaeology Review*. **BAR** is the only magazine that connects the academic study of archaeology to a broad general audience eager to understand the world of the Bible. Covering both the Old and New Testaments, **BAR** presents the latest discoveries and controversies in archaeology with breathtaking photography and informative maps and diagrams. **BAR**'s writers are the top scholars, the leading researchers, the world-renowned experts. **BAR** is the only nonsectarian forum for the discussion of Biblical archaeology.

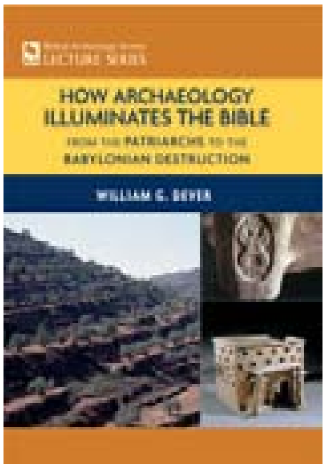
BAS produced two other publications, *Bible Review* from 1985–2005, and *Archaeology Odyssey* from 1998–2006. The complete editorial contents of all three magazines are available on **The BAS Library**. The BAS Library also contains the text of five highly-acclaimed books, *Ancient Israel*, *Aspects of Monotheism*, *Feminist Approaches to the Bible*, *The Rise of Ancient Israel* and *The Search for Jesus*. Yearly memberships to The BAS Library are available to everyone at www.biblicalarchaeology.org/library. This comprehensive collection of materials is also available to colleges, universities, churches and other institutions at www.basarchive.org.

Widespread Acclaim

The society, its magazine, and its founder and editor Hershel Shanks have been the subject of widespread acclaim and media attention in publications as diverse as *Time*, *People*, *Civilization*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Jerusalem Post*. **BAS** has also been featured on television programs aired by *CNN*, *PBS* and the *Discovery Channel*. To learn more about the Biblical Archaeology Society, go to www.biblicalarchaeology.org.

Also from the Biblical Archaeology Society

Do you want to learn more about the amazing sites and artifacts featured in *Ten Top Biblical Archaeology Discoveries*? Check out these BAS products to see how these and other discoveries are changing the way archaeologists and scholars view the world of the Bible.



How Archaeology Illuminates the Bible:

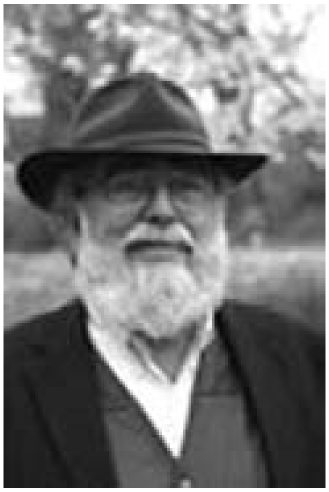
From the Patriarchs to the Babylonian Destruction

A Study Course by William G. Dever

Did the Israelites escape slavery in a mass exodus from Egypt? Was there a King David who established the United Monarchy in Jerusalem? What was everyday life like in ancient Israel? World-renowned archaeologist William G. Dever examines these important topics and others in ***How Archaeology Illuminates the Bible***, an eight-part series he created exclusively for the Biblical Archaeology Society. Along the way, he discusses the Tel Dan stela, Jerusalem's Stepped-Stone Structure and the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions, discoveries that have radically transformed scholarly understandings of ancient Israelite history and society. If you're looking for a comprehensive introduction to archaeology and the Hebrew Bible, look no further!
More information at:
http://store.bib-arch.org/How-Archaeology-Illuminatesbr_-the-Bible/productinfo/9HLD1/

The Lectures
- An Orientation to Biblical Archaeology: History, Aims and Methods
- Patriarchs and Matriarchs: History or Fiction?
- Who Were the Early Israelites, and Where Did They Come From?
- The Rise of the Israelite State: the "United Monarchy"
- Religion and Cult: One God or Many?
- Everyday Life in Biblical Times
- Israel's Neighbors in the Light of Recent Archaeological Research
- The Assyrian and Babylonian Destructions: The End or the Beginning?

DVD, 3 disks, Total running time: 6 hours, 30 minutes, $99.95



Dirt, Bones, Potsherds and Stones:

Archaeologists Probe the Galilee in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods

A Study Course by James F. Strange

Every occupation of land in any period leaves its human imprint. What looks at first to be a chaotic scatter of bits and pieces within archaeological trenches can resolve itself into settlement patterns, architecture, human movement, dedication of space to special uses, and even the scope and layout of a city. In this series of ten lectures by renowned New Testament archaeologist James F. Strange, you will learn how archaeologists make their inferences and examine key questions related to the world of the Gospels. Was there an early Christian sanctuary at Capernaum, where some believe St. Peter's house has been found? How central to Galilean life was Sepphoris, where the famed "Mona Lisa of the Galilee" mosaic was discovered? How do we recognize ancient synagogues without inscriptions or Jewish symbols?
More information at:
http://store.bib-arch.org/Dirt-Bones-Potsherds-and-Stones/productinfo/9HLP4/

<u>The Lectures</u>
- The "House of St. Peter" at Capernaum
- The Earliest Synagogue Buildings in Israel
- What Does this Building Invite Me to Do?
- The Case of Nazareth: A Jewish Christian Center?
- Settlement of Galilee in the Maccabean to Roman Period
- The Recovery of Judaism and the Resettlement of Galilee after 135 C.E.
- The Case of Sepphoris: A Major City in Galilee
- The Archaeology of "Jewish Christianity"
- The Tomb of Jesus in Talpiot
- Is an Archaeology of the Pharisees Possible?

DVD, 3 disks, Total running time: 7 hours, 57 minutes, $99.95

Table of Contents

Introduction

This eBook, developed by the editors at the Biblical Archaeology Society, features ten of the most important and exciting archaeological finds covered in the pages of *Biblical Archaeology Review* (**BAR)** over the past three and a half decades. It is by no means an exclusive list; others would perhaps make different selections for their top ten. Taken together, these “top discoveries,” from the nearly 4,000-year-old arched gate of Ashkelon to the lost fourth-century C.E. manuscripts of Nag Hammadi, offer a minicourse in Biblical archaeology.

This eBook includes the original **BAR** articles in which the finds were published, many authored by today’s most prominent Biblical archaeologists. Their articles not only highlight the historical and Biblical significance of these dramatic discoveries, but also place them in their appropriate archaeological context. In “When Canaanites and Philistines Ruled Ashkelon,” for example, Lawrence Stager provides a thorough overview of the port city’s extensive Bronze and Iron Age remains, including the massive walls and ramparts through which passed the world’s oldest arched gateway. Similarly in “The Siloam Pool,” **BAR** editor Hershel Shanks details the recent discovery of a monumental, first-century C.E. Jerusalem pool that functioned as a Jewish ritual bath (*miqveh*) and may have been the place where Jesus cured the blind man (John 9).

In these articles, you will also learn how the most important archaeological discoveries are often made completely by accident. In “‘David’ Found at Dan,” you’ll read how Gila Cook, an archaeological surveyor working at the site of Tel Dan in northern Israel, accidentally stumbled across an inscribed stone containing the first historical reference to King David outside the Bible. Likewise, in James Brashler’s article on the Nag Hammadi codices, you’ll learn how this invaluable collection of fourth-century C.E. Gnostic writings and lost gospels was found not by archaeologists, but rather by two farmers looking for fertilizer along the banks of the Nile.

We hope this collection of articles not only allows you to dive deeper into the world of the Biblical archaeology, but also reflect on the amazing discoveries that are made in the Biblical lands year after year.

Joey Corbett
Assistant Editor, Biblical Archaeology Society
2011

The Nag Hammadi Library

Nag Hammadi Codices Shed New Light on Early Christian History

By James Brashler



Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, Claremont, California

The Nag Hammadi texts were contained in 13 leather-bound volumes, or codices, discovered by Egyptian farmers in 1945. Dated papyrus scraps used to strengthen the bindings of the books helped date the volumes to the mid-fourth century C.E. The library contains more than 50 texts, or tractates, that explore the views of a heretical Christian sect known as the Gnostics, who were in conflict with orthodox Christian authorities.

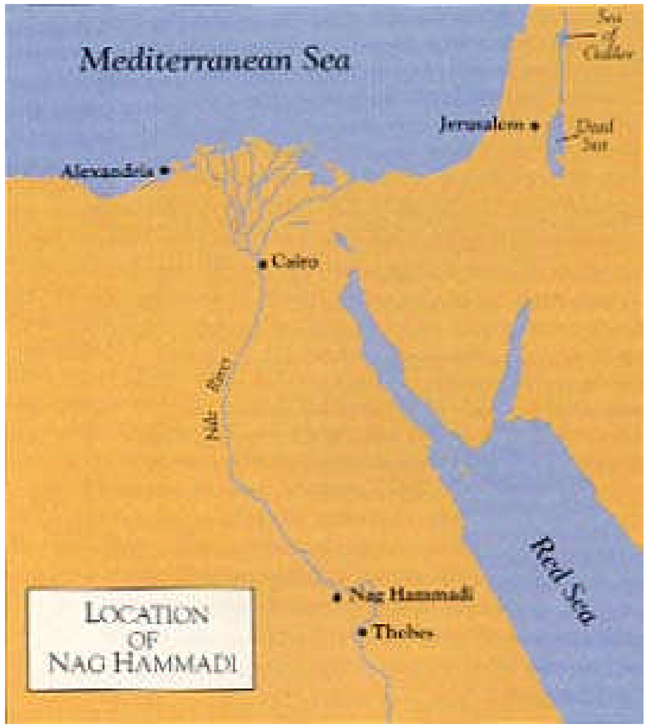


Courtesy of the Nag Hammadi Archive of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity

Papyrus-lined cover of Codex VII. The covers of the Nag Hammadi Codices not only preserved the 1,240 pages of texts, keeping most of them intact after 1,600 years, but they also provided a key to dating this archaeological treasure: Each leather cover was stiffened by layers of papyrus. Many of these papyri were the discarded personal and business documents of monks from the nearby Pachomian monasteries and often contained specific names and dates. This particular codex cover was made in part from business documents belonging to a monk named Sasnos, who had charge of the monastery herds. These documents refer to the years 333, 341 and 348, indicating that codex VII was put together in the middle of the fourth century.

It is a long way from the Nile Valley of Egypt to the front page of *The New York Review of Books* but the fascinating story of *The Gnostic Gospels* (Random House, 1979) by Elaine Pagels has traveled that far.

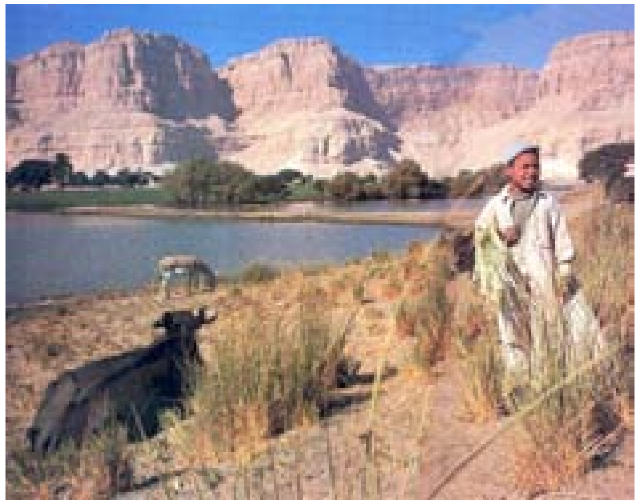
Books written by good scholars seldom achieve bestseller status. When the book is about a little-known collection of manuscripts associated with heretical religious sects and written in a dead language that few people have even heard of, bestseller status is even more remarkable. It is a tribute to the skill and ingenuity of Professor Elaine Pagels (with a “g” as in gelatin), formerly of Barnard College and now on the faculty of Princeton University, that her book *The Gnostic Gospels* has been so well received by the publishing establishment and the reading public. Summarized in a series of articles in *The New York Review of Books*, offered as a Book-of-the-Month Club alternate selection, and translated into several other languages, her book is a lucidly written account of the significance of the Coptic Gnostic[1] documents found in 1945 near Nag Hammadi, Egypt.



Map showing location of Nag Hammadi.

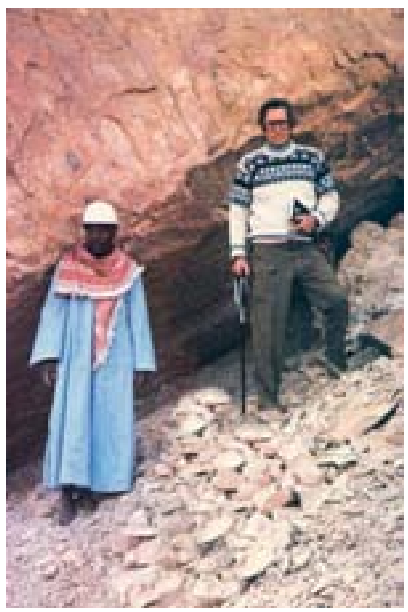
The story behind the discovery and eventual publication of the Nag Hammadi manuscripts has all the ingredients of a spy thriller. The discoverers, Mohammed Ali and his brother Khalifah, lived in a village named el-Kasr in Upper Egypt. While digging for mineral-rich soil at the base of the cliffs along the Nile near the village of Homra Dom, they discovered a large sealed pottery jar. Hoping for buried treasure, they broke open the jar only to find a collection of old books written in a language they could not read. They carried the books back to their home, where their mother reportedly used some of the pages to light the fire in her oven.

Not long after the discovery of the manuscripts, it was rumored that Mohammed Ali and his brothers murdered the son of the sheriff of Homra Dom in reprisal for the death of their father some six months earlier. One result of this feud was that Mohammed Ali was afraid to return to the site of the discovery. Fearing that the books would be found by the police, Mohammed Ali placed them in the care of a Coptic priest. The priest gave one to a relative, who brought it to Cairo. The rest of the books were gradually sold to other residents of the village for small sums of money, and they in turn sold the manuscripts to antiquities dealers in Cairo.



Courtesy of the Nag Hammadi Archive of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity

Cliffs along the Nile near Nag Hammadi, close to the site where the codices were found.

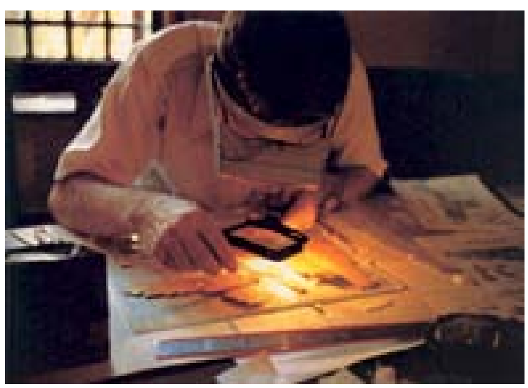


Courtesy of the Nag Hammadi Archive of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity

Muhammad Ali (left) at the site of the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices with James M. Robinson (right), who heads the team that published and translated the texts. Farmers of the Upper Nile annually fertilize their fields in December. In 1945, as they did every other year, Muhammad Ali and his brother Khalifah, went out with their camels below the cliffs near Nag Hammadi to gather precious nitrates for fertilizer. They stumbled on an old sealed pottery jug. Muhammad initially feared that a jinn, or evil spirit, resided inside. He later thought the vessel might contain some great treasure. What he found, however, were leather-bound volumes, which he finally decided were worthless. The books then passed through many hands—a Coptic priest's, an itinerant history teacher's, a Cypriot antiquities dealer's, a one-eyed bandit's—until the scholarly world gradually heard of what an Egyptian farmer had stumbled upon that December day.

One of these books was sold to the Coptic Museum; another made its way out of the country and was sold to friends of the psychologist C. G. Jung. They gave it to him as a birthday present, and it became known as the Jung Codex.[2] Ultimately, however, the bulk of the material was confiscated by the Egyptian government after having been photographed by a young French scholar, Jean Doresse. Just as Doresse's reports were alerting the scholarly world to the existence of an important new manuscript discovery, the Suez crisis of 1956 made international cooperation even more difficult than usual. As a result, most of the Nag Hammadi codices remained inaccessible to scholars. After the codices were declared government property and deposited in the Coptic Museum, an international committee of scholars working under the auspices of UNESCO was appointed, but the committee made little progress toward publishing the documents.

Not until the American Biblical scholar James M. Robinson of Claremont Graduate School entered the picture in 1965 and succeeded in gaining the support of other scholars in reorganizing the UNESCO committee did the Nag Hammadi story gradually emerge. Robinson concentrated his considerable scholarly influence, his organizational skill and his seemingly limitless energy on the prompt translation and publication of the Nag Hammadi documents. As the secretary of the UNESCO committee, Robinson headed an international team that photographed the manuscripts and conserved them as adequately as possible in their present repository, the Coptic Museum in Cairo. As the director of the Nag Hammadi Library project at the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity in Claremont, he organized a team of translators, many of them young American scholars, who learned the Coptic language as they worked with the new finds. And as organizer of the Nag Hammadi excavations, he delved into the early history of Christianity in Egypt.



Courtesy of the Nag Hammadi Archive of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity

Charles Hedrick joining fragments of the Nag Hammadi documents. The actual work of reassembling the codices and identifying and cataloging the hundreds of loose fragments took place in the library of the Coptic Museum in Cairo against a backdrop of international crises. In 1977, an English translation of all the codices was finally published.

Many other scholars subsequently have joined a growing movement to understand the complicated historical background of early Christianity assumed by the Nag Hammadi documents. Fortunately, the papers used to stiffen the covers of the Coptic codices were legal documents that referred to specific dates; therefore the manuscripts are solidly dated to the mid-fourth century. However, the codices are Coptic translations of documents that were written much earlier. Just how these translations fit into the complex picture of early Christianity and Judaism during the first two centuries of this era is a question that is currently a matter of considerable scholarly debate.

Elaine Pagels's book is an attempt to answer this exceedingly difficult question. Pagels makes it clear that she approaches these writings as a church historian, and her special interest is in uncovering the social milieu and ecclesiastical politics reflected in the Nag Hammadi codices that led to the rejection of the ideas they contain by the leaders of emerging orthodox Christianity. An analysis of the new texts from Nag Hammadi together with the previously known early Christian sources will make it possible, she says, to see "how politics and religion coincide in the development of Christianity … We can gain a startlingly new perspective on the origins of Christianity" (p. xxxvi).[3]

Pagels begins with a pivotal Christian doctrine, the resurrection of Jesus. Christian tradition is quite clear about this doctrine: Jesus of Nazareth died on a cross and arose bodily from the grave as a result of God's miraculous intervention. The church father Tertullian, among many others, emphasized the necessity of believing in the physical resurrection of Jesus and said that those who denied the bodily resurrection were heretics. The reasons for this view were not purely theological, Pagels suggests, but also political. She asserts that the consolidation of the religious and political authority of the orthodox bishops was a major factor in the development of the orthodox doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus. Faced with a bewildering variety of opinions and reports about the nature of the resurrected Jesus, church leaders turned to the reports of the apostles as authoritative and rejected the reports of others whose views were different.

The Nag Hammadi documents have preserved some of the differing views of the resurrection. They tell us that the opponents of the orthodox bishops believed in a spiritual resurrection that made Jesus alive to them through visions and mystical experiences. From the resurrected Jesus, the Gnostics received revelations of heavenly secrets and insights into the nature of ultimate reality.

The leaders of emerging orthodox Christianity rejected these Gnostic revelations as frauds. They insisted upon belief in the physical resurrection of Jesus as reported in the four

Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which they accepted as the measure (canon) of the truth. Gnostic teachers, on the other hand, claimed apostolic authority for their views also and criticized the orthodox believers for preferring a crude materialistic literalism that was inferior to their own spiritual knowledge. The dispute came down to a matter of authority: the traditional reports accepted by the church leaders versus the personal experiences of the Gnostic teachers and their followers. The political realities at stake in this dispute, according to Pagels, went far beyond the theological issues. The orthodox view, she concludes, "legitimized a hierarchy of persons through whose authority all others must approach God" (p. 27).

Another basic tenet of orthodox Christianity, the belief in one God, the Father, who created heaven and earth, came under strong attack from several fronts, including some represented by the writers of the Gnostic documents from Nag Hammadi. Several of these Gnostic works ridicule the creator God as a blind and ignorant tyrant who was not aware of a higher, purely spiritual deity, the ultimate source of all reality. In the Apocryphon of John, for example, the creator God is said to be weak and "impious in his madness … for he said, 'I am God and there is no other God beside me,' for he is ignorant of his strength, the place from which he had come" (II,*1*: 11, 18–22).[4]

Why did the orthodox leaders such as Irenaeus reject this view of God the creator as blasphemous? Pagels's answer is, again, that political and social realities played a significant role. A corollary to the belief in one creator God was the belief in one earthly representative of this God, the single monarchical bishop. Behind Gnostic rejection of the orthodox, monotheistic creator God was the implicit rejection of his representative, the bishop, and the clergy of the church that represented the bishop's authority in the congregations. Pagels finds evidence of Gnostic anticlericalism in The Apocalypse of Peter from Nag Hammadi, where the author states, "Others … outside our number … call themselves bishops and also deacons, as if they had received their authority from God. Those people are dry canals" (VII,*3*: 79, 22–32). In contrast to hierarchically organized orthodox Christian congregations, Gnostic fellowships were led by spirit-filled leaders chosen by lot with men and women participating as equals, Pagels tells us.

In a chapter entitled "God the Father/God the Mother," Pagels analyzes the traditional Christian language about God and contrasts it with Gnostic imagery and ideas found in the Nag Hammadi writings. She concludes that "many of these texts speak of God as a dyad who embraces both masculine and feminine elements" (p. 49). Aware of the diversity of the texts, she asserts that they depict God as having a female dimension, often complementing a male dimension. The female side exists in a kind of polarity akin to the *yin* and *yang* in Eastern views of ultimate reality. Furthermore, she says, the Gnostic texts present the deity as a divine mother

who is Holy Spirit. A divine trinity made up of Father, Mother and Son is also found in some of the Nag Hammadi documents. The divine mother is sometimes characterized as the personification of wisdom or ultimate truth. In this role she bears the name Sophia, the Greek word for wisdom.

This feminine imagery in the Gnostic writings was suppressed, to use Pagels's term, by orthodox church leaders who rejected the social consequences of such ideas, namely, the inclusion of women as equals, especially in the life and leadership of the church. According to Pagels, " … from the year 200, we have no evidence for women taking prophetic, priestly and episcopal roles among orthodox churches" (p. 61). This is surprising, she says, in the light of the openness to women she finds in earlier Christianity and a general cultural trend toward an expanded role for women in later Roman society. Conflicts over the status of women and related questions of sexuality are reflected in the Nag Hammadi writings, Pagels says. Her conclusion is that "The Nag Hammadi sources, discovered at a time of contemporary social crises concerning sexual roles, challenge us to reinterpret history—and to re-evaluate the present situation" (p. 69).

Pagels also discusses two other basic Christian theological affirmations, the crucifixion of Jesus and the nature of the church. In both cases, she contrasts the dominant early Christian view that came to be accepted as the orthodox faith with views found in the Nag Hammadi codices. The contrasts are striking. Was Jesus a human being who really suffered or a spirit who only appeared to suffer? Is the Christian church a holy, catholic family of believers with a common creed, a recognized canon of sacred scriptures and an apostolic hierarchy headed by the bishop or is the true church a fellowship of enlightened brothers and sisters whose spiritual experiences and knowledge unite them in a spiritual bond?

Even more significant, in Pagels's opinion, are the implications for everyday life that these differing theological views implied for their adherents. Those who emphasized the physical nature of Jesus' suffering placed a high value on the suffering of Christians who were persecuted for their faith. Thus, the cult of martyrs and saints who died at the hands of Roman persecutors became a part of orthodox Christian belief. While some Gnostics seemed to value highly the sufferings of Jesus and saw him as a forerunner who triumphed over physical oppression, other Gnostics emphasized Jesus' spiritual nature and minimized the significance of his suffering. They identified themselves with the spiritual Jesus who never actually died. Quite logically, from this point of view, they rejected the value of martyrdom and considered the eagerness of some Christians to suffer persecution as misguided enthusiasm. In its most extreme form this enthusiasm was turned against the Gnostics themselves, Pagels suggests, when zealous orthodox Christians later persecuted Gnostics for their heretical views.

Codex II, also known as the Gospel of Thomas, is one of the best known of the Gnostic documents found at Nag Hammadi. The forgotten gospel preserves 114 sayings attributed to Jesus, many of which were not included in the canonical Gospels. The gospel opens with the mystical promise, "Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death."



Courtesy of the Nag Hammadi Archive of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity

In a concluding chapter entitled "Gnosis: Self-knowledge as Knowledge of God," Pagels summarizes the Gnostic view that human suffering is the result of ignorance rather than sin. Salvation, then, is to be found in the form of knowledge (*gnosis*), and knowledge is to be understood as liberating insight into ultimate reality and personal identity rather than factual data. According to the Gnostic documents, such insight comes from the Gnostic revealer, the Savior—usually Jesus, but other figures sometimes are named—who is described as a heavenly messenger. His message is one of internal illumination, self-understanding and symbolic truth often cast in mythological language. Inner confusion and self-contradictions give way to inner peace and mystical ecstasy when *gnosis* replaces ignorance and when light replaces darkness. Such a religion, says Pagels, understandably appealed to only a few, and "was no match for the highly effective system of organization of the catholic church" (p. 140).

This effective organization led by the bishops accounts for the survival and character of Christianity, Pagels concludes. She readily acknowledges her appreciation for the theological and political acumen of the winners in the struggle for dominance in early Christianity. Nevertheless, her sympathies for the losers in the struggle to define orthodox Christianity are equally clear. She admires "those restless, inquiring people who marked out a solitary path of self-discovery" (p.

149) and implies that they embody more of the values of Jesus of Nazareth than their orthodox opponents were willing to admit. She does not advocate a revival of Gnosticism or take its side against orthodox Christianity. Instead, as a historian, she has written her book in order to explore the evidence—especially the newly discovered and published evidence—pertaining to the origins of Christianity.

As a popular presentation of a difficult and complex topic, *The Gnostic Gospels* has enjoyed success rarely achieved by such books. Pagels has demonstrated that she is a gifted writer as well as a technically proficient scholar. It takes courage to tackle such an assignment and do it well; she has succeeded where few others have dared to try. As a scholar who is familiar with the documents as well as the historical and theological complexities Pagels deals with, I applaud her book as a provocative contribution to the world of serious religious writing.

As one might expect, Pagels has her critics. They tend to be scholars who challenge the accuracy of her details or dispute what one of them has referred to as her tendency toward "the greening of the Gnostics." Roman Catholic scholars in particular have suggested that she has put the Gnostics in far too favorable a light, while at the same time putting the orthodox church fathers in a correspondingly bad light. Others suggest that she has not examined her sources with full rigor and has extracted from them only those passages that fit her own contemporary feminist biases or those of the book-buying public. To some extent such criticism may reflect bruised piety or sour grapes. It may also be the result of expecting more from a popular book than that genre permits.

Pagels's work is certainly not beyond criticism. My own view is that she has offered more than she can deliver. The promise of revolutionary new insights at the beginning of the book diminishes by the end of the book to provocative questions she only begins to explore. At times she seems to move almost unconsciously from a possibility suggested in the subjunctive mood or in a rhetorical question to a probability or an assumption of the same idea.[5] To me, the linkage between theological views and social/political practices is asserted rather than demonstrated in the book. Of course such a connection is extremely difficult to establish conclusively, especially when our historical sources are incomplete and the products of those who were themselves involved in the complex process of doctrinal development. Her use of the term "political" will strike some readers as unusual, because she means ecclesiastical politics for the most part instead of the broader area of governmental and civic activities.

For people interested in Biblical archaeology, Elaine Pagels has done a masterful job of describing and summarizing a major manuscript discovery that is extremely important in the

history of early Christianity and contemporaneous Judaism. Gnostic writers were clearly indebted to both traditions and have preserved elements of those early traditions that were pushed to the periphery or excluded altogether from orthodox Christianity and rabbinical Judaism. Traditions about Jesus from the Nag Hammadi writings, especially collections of his sayings such as the Gospel of Thomas, provide new and potentially very significant material for New Testament studies. They may provide important clues to possibly authentic words of Jesus not preserved in the New Testament. Interpretations of the early chapters of the Book of Genesis according to Gnostic writers help illumine Jewish and Christian interpretations of those important chapters, such as those of the Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, as well as the Apostle Paul. The Nag Hammadi documents have also been used to shed light on the Gospel of John and the epistles of Paul. Pagels's doctoral dissertation at Harvard University (published in 1973) and another book she wrote on Paul in 1975 investigated the relationships between John and Paul, on the one hand, and the ideas of Gnostic teachers such as Valentinus and Basilides, on the other. Scholars are still trying to resolve these complex issues with the help of the Gnostic writings.

The Nag Hammadi codices surely help us understand the tendency toward a mystical piety based on revelation or ecstatic experience as one of the varieties of religious experience in the Greco-Roman world of late antiquity. These writings also provide new material for understanding the many types of ancient Gnosticism. How Greek philosophical thought interacted with early Christianity in both its Gnostic and emerging orthodox forms can also be illumined by these new writings.

Attempts to uncover the circumstances that led to the burial of the Nag Hammadi manuscripts have not been as successful as the archaeological excavations that were so helpful in shedding light on another major manuscript discovery, the Dead Sea Scrolls. An excavation carried out by the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity in Claremont, California, under the leadership of Robinson and Dr. Bastiaan Van Elderen, has uncovered significant remains of early Christian monastic communities near the discovery site. Direct links with the Nag Hammadi codices themselves have not been found, however, and even the precise location of the find is not known for certain. The broader questions of how a collection of mostly Gnostic literature came to be buried near the center of early Christian monasteries considered to be bastions of orthodoxy are yet to be answered conclusively by scholars. How Gnostic and orthodox leaders interacted in the development of Christianity in Egypt and other centers of Christianity such as Alexandria and Rome is one of the concerns of a new project being undertaken by Dr. Birger Pearson and several associates under the auspices of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity.

The ‘Ain Dara Temple

The New ‘Ain Dara Temple: Closest Solomonic Parallel

By John Monson



Marie-Henriette Gates

From the rubble-filled courtyard in the foreground to the shrine room in the distance, the ancient temple at ‘Ain Dara, Syria, is our closest parallel—in size, date and design—to the Temple built by King Solomon in the tenth century B.C.E. Beautifully preserved despite fire damage and massive looting (for many years, the remains served as a quarry for local builders), the Syrian temple allows us to visualize the magnificent Jerusalem Temple that was utterly destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. Built on the highest point of the tell, the temple (dating from 1300 to 740 B.C.E.) was fully excavated in the 1980s but has received little attention since—despite its correspondences with Solomon’s Temple.

A stunning parallel to Solomon’s Temple has been discovered in northern Syria.[1] The temple at ‘Ain Dara has far more in common with the Jerusalem Temple described in the Book of Kings than any other known building. Yet the newly excavated temple has received almost no attention in this country, at least partially because the impressive excavation report, published a decade ago, was written in German by a Syrian scholar and archaeologist.[2]

For centuries, readers of the Bible have tried to envision Solomon’s glorious Jerusalem Temple, dedicated to the Israelite God, Yahweh. Nothing of Solomon’s Temple remains today; the Babylonians destroyed it utterly in 586 B.C.E. And the vivid Biblical descriptions are of limited help in reconstructing the building: Simply too many architectural terms have lost their meaning

over the ensuing centuries, and too many details are absent from the text. Slowly, however, archaeologists are beginning to fill in the gaps in our knowledge of Solomon's building project.

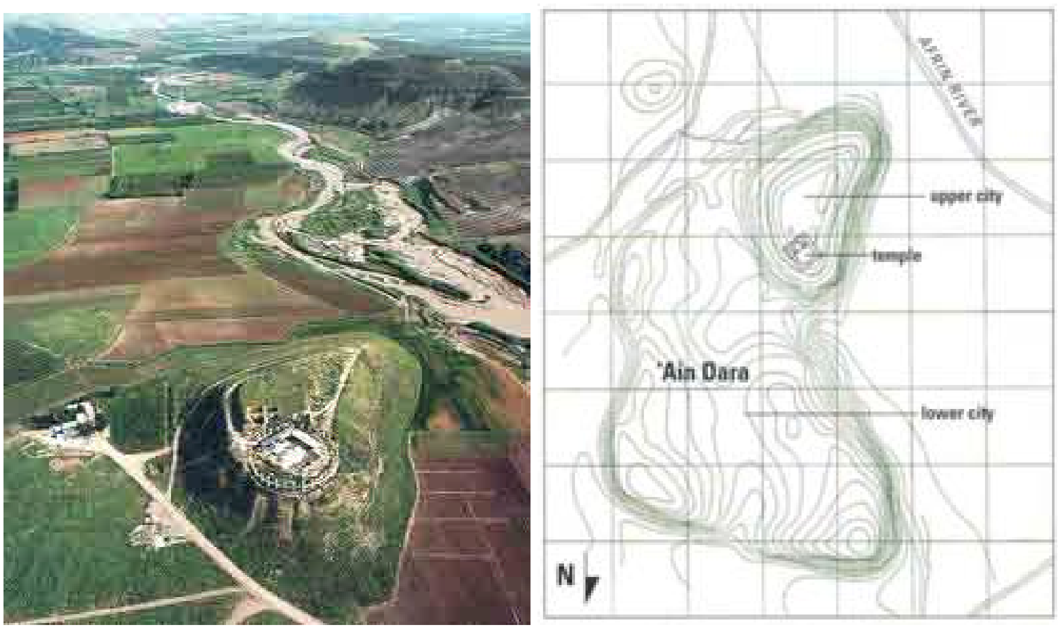
For years, pride of place went to the temple at Tell Ta'yinat, also in northern Syria.[a] When it was discovered in 1936, the Tell Ta'yinat temple, unlike the 'Ain Dara temple, caused a sensation because of its similarities to Solomon's Temple. Yet the 'Ain Dara temple is closer in time to Solomon's Temple by about a century (it is, in fact, essentially contemporaneous), is much closer in size to Solomon's Temple than the smaller Tell Ta'yinat temple, has several features found in Solomon's Temple but not in the Tell Ta'yinat temple, and is far better preserved than the Tell Ta'yinat temple. In short, the 'Ain Dara temple, which was excavated between 1980 and 1985, is the most significant parallel to Solomon's Temple ever discovered.



Map showing location of 'Ain Dara.

The 'Ain Dara temple helps us better understand a number of enigmatic features in the Bible's description of Solomon's Temple. It also figures in the current debate, which has often raged in these pages,[b] as to the existence of David and Solomon and their United Monarchy in the tenth century B.C.E. And it is a magnificent structure in its own right. The 'Ain Dara temple has beautifully preserved structural features, including limestone foundations and blocks of basalt. The building originally had a mudbrick superstructure—now lost—which may have been covered with wood paneling. The facade and interior walls are enlivened by hundreds of finely carved reliefs depicting lions, cherubim and other mythical creatures, mountain gods, palmettes and ornate geometric designs.

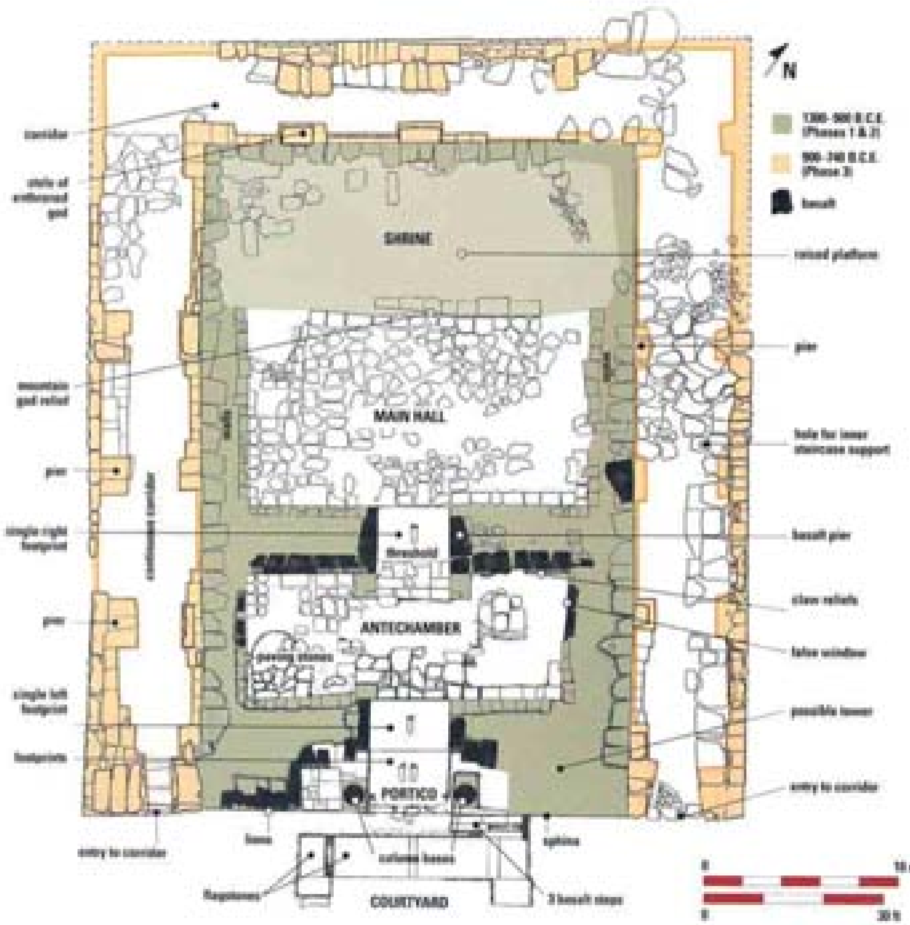
‘Ain Dara lies near the Syro-Turkish border, about 40 miles northwest of Aleppo and a little more than 50 miles northeast of Tell Ta‘yinat. The site is large, consisting of a main tell that rises 90 feet above the surrounding plain and an extensive lower city, which covers about 60 acres. ‘Ain Dara first attracted attention in 1955, with the chance discovery of a monumental basalt lion. Although the site was occupied from the Chalcolithic period (fourth millennium B.C.E.) to the Ottoman period (1517–1917 C.E.), the temple is undoubtedly the most spectacular discovery at the site. According to the excavator, Ali Abu Assaf, it existed for 550 years—from about 1300 B.C.E. to 740 B.C.E. He has identified three structural phases during this period.



Georg Gerster/Photo Researchers, Inc.

‘Ain Dara from above. In this aerial photograph of the upper city, the temple remains lie within a circle of columns erected by a restoration team. At right is a plan of the site.

The building was constructed in Phase 1, which lasted from 1300 B.C.E. to 1000 B.C.E. Oriented towards the southeast, the temple is rectangular in plan, about 65 feet wide by 98 feet long. Built on a large raised platform, the temple consists essentially of three rooms: a niche-like portico, or porch; an antechamber (sometimes called the *pronaos*); and a main hall (cella, or *naos*), which housed the innermost shrine (in Biblical terms the *debir*, or holy of holies).



Plan of the ‘Ain Dara temple.

In Phase 2 (1000–900 B.C.E.), the period during which the Solomonic Temple was built, the ‘Ain Dara temple remained basically the same, except for the addition of basalt piers on the front facade of the building, immediately behind the columns, and in the entrances leading from the portico to the antechamber and from the antechamber to the main hall. Reliefs and a stela were also added to the shrine at the back of the main hall.

In Phase 3 (900–740 B.C.E.), an ambulatory, or hall, consisting of a series of side chambers was added on three sides of the building. The chambers were laid on the pre-existing temple platform, which extended beyond this new construction. The foundations of these chambers are not connected to the main part of the temple, indicating that they are a later addition.[3]

The dating of the two earlier phases was determined not by levels (stratigraphy) or by pottery (the excavation report does not record the stratigraphy and pottery of the temple), but by a comparison of the sculpture with that from other excavated sites.[4]




Marie-Henriette Gates

To enter the temple, worshipers would cross the flagstone pavement—made of massive limestone slabs framed with narrow strips of black basalt—in the temple courtyard. Mythic creatures, carved from basalt, enlivened the walls surrounding the entryway. To the right of the entrance is a sphinx, with a bull's body, the feathered breast and wings of an eagle, and a human face (right).

Like Solomon's Temple, the 'Ain Dara temple was approached by a courtyard paved with flagstones. A large chalkstone basin used for ceremonial purposes stood in this courtyard. (A large basin was also placed in the courtyard of the Jerusalem Temple [1 Kings 7:23–26].) At the far end of the open courtyard, the temple stood on a 2.5-foot-high platform made of rubble and limestone and lined with basalt blocks engraved with lions, sphinxes and other mythic creatures. A monumental staircase, flanked on each side by a sphinx and two lions, led up to the temple portico. The four basalt steps, only three of which survive, were decorated with a carved guilloche pattern, which consists of interlacing curved lines. The building itself was covered with rows of basalt reliefs of sphinxes, lions, mountain gods and other creatures.[5]

Today, only the massive bases remain of the two columns that flanked the open entryway of the portico. These basalt columns, measuring about 3 feet in diameter, originally supported a roof that protected the portico. The portico entryway follows a common architectural plan known as *distyle in antis; distyle* (literally "two columns") refers to the pillars that support the roof, and *antis* (from the Latin for "opposing") refers to the extended arms of the building, which form the portico's side walls and frame the entryway. At either side of this portico are wide square projections that may have supported towers or staircases. Wedged between these two projections, the entryway appears to be simply a niche in the facade of the building, rather than a separate room.

Sphinxes and colossal lions, carved into the interior walls of the portico, guard the passage into the antechamber. Two large slabs line the portico floor. On these floor slabs are

carved gigantic human footprints—each more than 3 feet long. Two footprints appear on the first slab and one left footprint on the second, as if some giant had paused at the entryway before striding into the building. In ancient conception the temple was the abode of the god, which is why these have been interpreted as the footprints of the resident god—or goddess, as we shall see.



A. M. Appa

Divine footprints? Three 3-foot-long footprints are carved into the limestone slabs lining the floor of the temple portico. The delicate carving is designed to look as if the prints were impressed into the stone by an extra-human figure striding into the temple.

Throughout the Near East, temples were considered the dwelling places of gods. The Jerusalem Temple, for example, was known in Hebrew as *Beit Yahweh*, the House of Yahweh. These footprints—a very unusual image in ancient Near Eastern art—are probably intended to indicate the presence of the deity who resided in the temple.

Based on the profusion of reliefs and sculptures of lions throughout the building, excavator Assaf attributes the temple to the goddess Ishtar, whose attribute is the lion; hence our use of the feminine.[c] While the footprints are those of a barefoot human, the deities in all the ‘Ain Dara temple reliefs are wearing shoes with curled-up toes. So readers must choose their own interpretation.



Erich Lessing

Balancing on a lion's back, the goddess Ishtar appears on this eighth-century B.C.E. stela from Tel Barsib, northeast of 'Ain Dara, Syria. The goddess of love and war, Ishtar was the principal female deity of Mesopotamia. An early-first-millennium poem exalts Ishtar as "goddess of goddesses," "queen of all peoples" and as both a "lion" and "lioness." The abundance of lion statuary at 'Ain Dara has led excavator Ali Abu Assaf to identify the temple as a monument to Ishtar.

Large basalt orthostats[d] engraved with flowery ribbon patterns lined the lower walls of the antechamber. Above them were carvings of immense clawed creatures. The identity of these animals is uncertain as only the claws have survived.



Courtesy Tadateru Nishiura, the Tokyo National Research Institute of Cultural Properties

A tier of basalt slabs engraved with a ribbonlike design runs beneath the windows and around the entire room. Only the carved claws remain of a tier of massive birdlike animals that once perched above this frieze.

Three steps, decorated with a chainlike carving, lead up from the broad but shallow antechamber (it is 50 feet wide but only 25 feet deep) to the main hall, which forms an almost perfect square (54.5 by 55 feet). At the top of the stairs, a limestone slab serves as the threshold to the main chamber. Whoever was striding into the temple portico left a similarly enormous right footprint on this threshold. The distance between the two single footprints is about 30 feet. A stride of 30 feet would belong to a person (or goddess) about 65 feet tall. A lion is carved in profile on each of the doorposts of the entryway to the main hall.



Erich Lessing

The gods of ‘Ain Dara. Two horned bull-men flank a mountain god in this relief from the ‘Ain Dara temple’s holy of holies. The deity may be identified by his signature scaled skirt, which is thought to represent the mountain where he dwells.

At the far end of the main hall is an elevated podium. This was the shrine, or holy of holies, the most sacred area in the temple. A ramp led up to the podium (or dais), which occupied the back third of the main hall. The rear wall of the chamber behind the podium has a shallow niche (*adyton*) in it, perhaps for a statue of the deity or a standing stone. Reliefs depicting various mountain gods lined the podium and the walls of the chamber. The mountain god, too, has a connection with the goddess Ishtar, who, in some incarnations, takes this deity as her lover. This lends further support to the excavator’s suggestion that the temple was dedicated to Ishtar.



A stela from the temple's outer corridor depicts a goddess dressed in a semi-transparent gown. If the temple is indeed dedicated to Ishtar, this stela may represent the goddess, who took a mountain god as her lover. But the fact that this figure wears shoes, and the footprints in the temple threshold are bare, calls into question this identification.

Erich Lessing

A wooden screen—now lost—may have once separated the podium from the rest of the main hall: Several holes, or sockets, visible in the left wall (facing the podium) of the main hall and one in the right wall may have supported brackets for the screen.

Certainly one of the most splendid features of the ‘Ain Dara temple is the once multistoried hallway that enclosed the building on three sides during Phase 3. We conclude that it had at least one upper story—and maybe more—based on the thickness and number of large piers, set at regular intervals, which would have provided additional support for the wood and mudbrick construction of the upper floors. (The side chambers in Solomon's Temple, incidentally, had three stories, which decreased in width from lowest to highest [1 Kings 6:5–10].)

These side chambers, which could be entered from either side of the portico, formed a continuous raised hallway that wrapped around three sides of the temple. Sculptures of lions guarded the entrances. Preserved to a height of nearly 5 feet, the corridor walls are lined with more than 80 panels carved with reliefs. In addition, 30 opposing stelae featuring a variety of scenes—a king on his throne, a palm tree, a standing god, offerings—stood on both sides of the corridor. (These are identified as *migra‘ot*, or piers, in 1 Kings 6:6; Ezekiel 41:6.) The exquisite workmanship in the side chambers indicates that they did not function merely as storage space. Indeed, the beautiful carvings indicate they may have had some ceremonial function. But what, precisely, would have been the function of these chambers? Again, readers must provide their own suggestions.



Peter Grünwald, Deutsches Archäologisches Institute, Orientabteilung, Berlin

Biblical puzzle solved. A 15-foot-wide hallway wraps around three sides of the 'Ain Dara temple. In this excavation photo, the back wall of the temple's shrine room appears at right. Two massive basalt stelae protrude from the wall. The outer corridor wall (at left) was also originally decorated with stelae and reliefs.

This corridor is a unique archaeological find in second and first millennium B.C.E. temples. Yet it still has a parallel—in the Bible's description of the Jerusalem Temple: "Against the outside wall of the House—the outside walls of the House enclosing the Great Hall and the Shrine—he built a storied structure; and he made side chambers all around … The entrance to the middle [story of] the side chambers was on the right side of the House; and a return staircase [?] led up to the middle chambers and from the middle chambers to the third story" (1 Kings 6:5, 8). The thickness of these corridor walls at 'Ain Dara suggests that it, too, may have supported at least one upper story.



A. M. Appa

A stela found in the temple's outermost corridor once depicted an enthroned deity. Only the bottom of the relief has survived, which shows (from left) two legs of a throne and the deity's own two feet, emerging from beneath the hem of a gown.

The exterior walls of these outer chambers were also decorated with lions and sphinxes, indicating the limited repertoire from which the carvers worked.

As already noted, the ‘Ain Dara temple shares many features with Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem. Indeed, no other building excavated to date has as many features in common with the Biblical description of the Jerusalem Temple. Most basically, both have essentially the same three-division, long-room plan: At ‘Ain Dara, it is an entry portico, an antechamber and main chamber with screened-off shrine; in Solomon’s Temple, it is an entry portico (’*ulam*), main hall (*heikhal*) and shrine, or holy of holies (*debir*).[e] The only significant difference between the two is the inclusion of the antechamber in the ‘Ain Dara plan. With this exception the two plans are almost identical.

If the royal cubit used to build Solomon’s Temple was 52.5 centimeters, then the Jerusalem Temple measured approximately 120 feet by 34 feet. The ‘Ain Dara temple is 98 feet long by 65 wide (or 125 by 105 feet including the side chambers). (The Tell Ta‘yinat temple is only 81 feet long.) The ‘Ain Dara temple is thus not only the closest in date but also the closest in size of any temple in the Levant.

Like most ancient temples, both buildings stood at the highest elevation in the city. Both temples were built on a platform and had a courtyard in front with a monumental staircase (*ma‘aleh*, cf. Ezekiel 40:22) leading up to the temple.

In both cases the portico was narrower and shallower than the rooms of the temple. In both cases the portico was open on one side and had a roof supported by two pillars. (Unlike many reconstructions of Solomon’s Temple, the pillars Boaz and Jachin were not free-standing; indeed, the comparanda, such as the pillars at ‘Ain Dara, help to establish this. The position of the pillar bases at both ‘Ain Dara and Tell Ta‘yinat indicates they were load-bearing columns.)

In both cases spectacular reliefs decorated the walls, and the carvings in both temples share several motifs: The stylized floral designs and lily patterns, palmettes, winged creatures and lions of ‘Ain Dara may be compared with the “bas reliefs and engravings of cherubim, palm trees, and flower patterns, in the inner and outer rooms” of Solomon’s Temple (1 Kings 6:29).

The elevated podium at the back of the ‘Ain Dara temple, covering a third of the floor area of the main hall and set off from the forepart by a separate screen, is a commanding parallel for the Biblical holy of holies.

Without going into greater detail here, I have determined that the ‘Ain Dara temple shares 33 of the roughly 65 architectural elements mentioned in the Bible in connection with Solomon’s Temple.

Several additional features of the ‘Ain Dara temple help us to better understand aspects of the Biblical Temple as described in the Book of Kings. For example, the Biblical holy of holies is described as a wooden cube measuring 20 cubits on each side (1 Kings 6:20; Ezekiel 41:3–4) in a room 30 cubits high (1 Kings 6:2). It is unclear whether a 10-cubit stairway led up to the holy of holies or whether the shrine was on the same level as the main hall but had a lower ceiling and a space above. The ‘Ain Dara temple, as well as other comparanda, clearly indicates that a stairway would have led up to the holy of holies in Solomon’s Temple.

The outer ambulatory of ‘Ain Dara provides one of the site’s most dramatic contributions to our understanding of the Solomonic Temple. According to 1 Kings 6:5, the Biblical Temple was enclosed by something called *sela‘ot*, usually translated “side chambers.” But until the excavation of ‘Ain Dara, the term *sela‘to* defied a convincing explanation. That’s because before ‘Ain Dara, outer corridors were never attested in a second- or first-millennium B.C.E. temple. I believe that the hallways flanking the ‘Ain Dara temple can be none other than the *sela‘ot* of 1 Kings 6:5. These walkways at ‘Ain Dara are 18 feet wide, as are the Biblical side chambers (when the 5-cubit [about 8-foot] side chamber and 6-cubit [about 10-foot] outer wall of the Biblical Temple are added together). The ‘Ain Dara hallway is reached through doors on either side of the temple entrance, which brings to mind 1 Kings 6:8: “There was an entrance to the *sela‘ot* on the right side of the temple.”

On the basis of the side chambers at ‘Ain Dara and in Solomon’s Temple, it may be well to re-examine the evidence from other sites. I now suspect that side chambers were quite common. I have already identified seven temples, including Shechem, Megiddo and Alalakh, in which the foundations were wide enough to support multistoried side chambers built against the walls of the temple proper.

Another conundrum in the Biblical description of Solomon’s Temple: The Book of Kings refers to the Temple windows as *shequfim ’atumîm* (1 Kings 6:4). A footnote in the new Jewish Publication Society translation tells us the meaning is uncertain. The windows have variously been described as “recessed and latticed” or “framed and blocked.” Some scholars consider any attempt at translation to be an exercise in futility. Lawrence Stager of Harvard University has proposed that the phrase refers to windowlike frames that were stopped up with rubble—that is, *faux* (false) windows.[6] ‘Ain Dara offers an intriguing parallel that allows us to take this idea a step

further. At least two window frames were carved into the walls of the temple's antechamber. Both windows have a recessed frame on each side; on top, the frame is also indented but is slightly arched. The upper half of each window is filled in with basalt carvings of horizontal rows of figure eights lying on their sides. The lower half is flat with a guilloche pattern running along the bottom. This, I believe, represents the kind of window lattice described in 1 Kings 6:4, thus providing a solution to a riddle that has eluded commentators for generations (compare Judges 5:28; Song of Songs 2:9 and Ben Sirach 42:11).



Courtesy Tadateru Nishiura, the Tokyo National Research Institute of Cultural Properties

"Recessed and latticed" windows adorned Solomon's Temple, according to 1 Kings 6:4. Scholars have long wondered just what this enigmatic Biblical description might refer to. Monson suggests that this recessed and latticed carving from the antechamber of the 'Ain Dara temple may provide a key.

These faux windows would perhaps have been complemented by true windows close to the ceiling. One additional window frame, in this case an open one, appears in the northeast corner of the 'Ain Dara temple.

The Bible describes "five-sided" (*hamshit*) and "four-sided" (*rebi'it*) doors that led into the main hall and shrine of Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 6:31, 33). These, too, have long puzzled commentators (and have led to a number of creative interpretations).[7] In my view, these expressions refer not to the number of surfaces or sides in the door but the number of recesses in the door frame. Even the most basic door frames in the buildings of the ancient Near East often had a single recess, as the necropolis of Silwan in Jerusalem reveals.[8] The doors in more luxurious structures—all over the Mediterranean world and in Mesopotamia—had several recesses in the frame. This is known as rabbeting; in a wooden construction, it is attained by fitting together several receding door frames. This can be replicated in stone on both doors and windows—as shown by the 'Ain Dara temple and the description of Solomon's Temple.



Erich Lessing

An ivory from Arslan Tash, in northern Syria, depicts a woman gazing out of a small square window with receding window frames. The doors of Solomon's Temple, which are described as "five-sided" and "four-sided," may also have been framed by a series of interlocking, receding doorposts.

While the ʻAin Dara temple makes its own singular contribution to our understanding of Solomon's Temple, it must also be seen as part of a typology of ancient Near Eastern temples. Architecture, like ancient scripts and pottery, can be organized into chronological sequences and typologies. A century of archaeological research has unearthed a sizable corpus of parallel temples in the Levant that allow for increasingly refined reconstructions. In the years subsequent to the excavation of the Tell Taʻyinat temple, others were discovered at such sites as Megiddo, Zinjirli, Alalakh and Hamath. Each of these temples was associated with an adjacent palace, as, of course, was the case with Solomon's Temple (2 Chronicles 2:1, 12). They date to various periods of the second and first millennia B.C.E. and conform very well to the Biblical description of Solomon's regal-ritual center in Jerusalem.[9]

The assemblage of temples has continued to expand during the past two decades. Today we know of at least two dozen excavated temples that may be compared to Solomon's Temple. Most of them are of the long-room type and come from the area north of the Israelite heartland. The Bible itself tells us that Solomon's Temple design was mediated through Hiram of Tyre and other artisans from Phoenicia, the coastal region north of Israel (1 Kings 5, 7:13–37 [NJPS]).[10] Amihai Mazar has called this temple plan the "symmetrical Syrian temple type."[11] Each has a courtyard in front, a portico, two rooms beyond and an elevated inner room, or holy of holies, at the rear, usually with a niche at the back. Each temple, of course, had its own configuration of secondary features, such as towers protruding from the facade, pillars flanking the entrance, and side chambers. Together they may therefore be regarded as hybrid temples that incorporate a mixture of indigenous and imported architectural forms appropriated for the local religious tradition of each city-state. The Jerusalem Temple includes features that belong to both

Canaanite and North Syrian building traditions. Its various components reflect a combination of local traditions and cultural borrowing from farther afield. The influence of the Syrian long-room plan and the iconography of Phoenicia, Syria and Egypt are undeniable. But in the end, neither the Jerusalem Temple nor any of its closest parallels are traceable to a single, monolithic temple tradition.





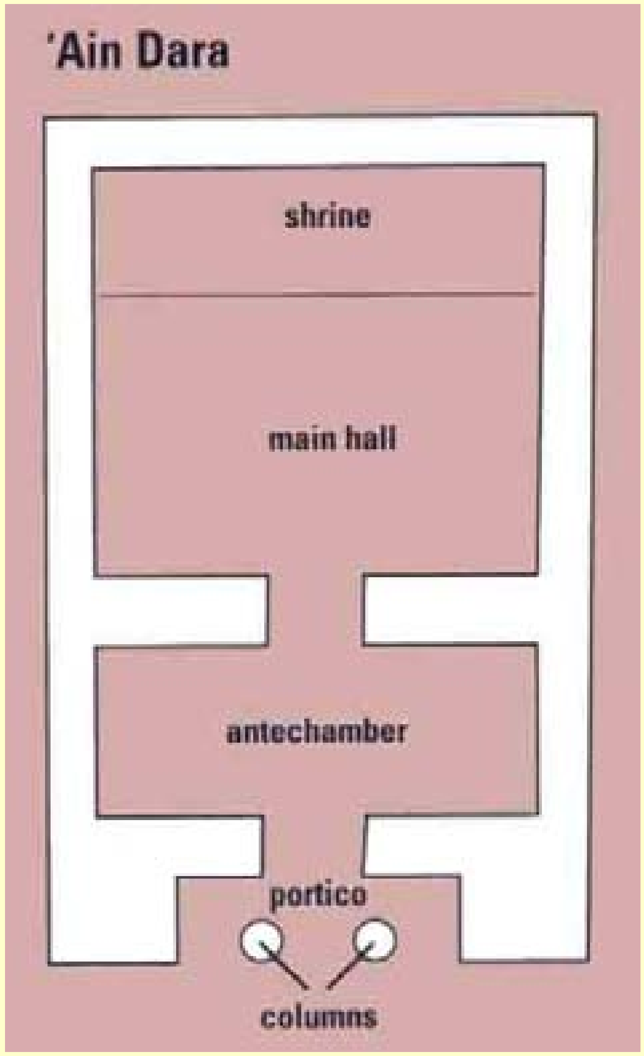
Musée de la Civilisation, Quebec/courtesy of the Directeur Général des Antiquités et des Musées, Syria/Peter Grünwald, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Orientabteilung, Berlin

The faces of ‘Ain Dara are characterized by almond eyes, rounded noses and half-smiling lips—all sculpted in basalt. The 22-inch figure—perhaps a royal or divine female—shown at left wears a diadem studded with rosettes. This face, shown restored, was found in numerous pieces. The 35-inch-tall face at right originally belonged to one of the hybrid lion creatures that lined the facade of the building.

Chronologically, the ‘Ain Dara temple forms a bridge in the temple sequence between the Late Bronze Age (1500–1200 B.C.E.) temple at Hazor (Area H) and the eighth-century B.C.E. Iron Age temple at Tell Ta‘yinat. The ‘Ain Dara temple corroborates the date of the Solomonic Temple to the early first millennium with a high degree of probability, regardless of the date assigned to the composition of the Biblical text. The Jerusalem Temple thus takes its place comfortably within the typology of Iron Age temples despite the dearth of architectural remains in Jerusalem. Such a broad-based typology is hard to overturn. As it is described in the Hebrew Bible, the Temple of Solomon is a typical hybrid temple belonging to the long-room Syrian type.

Simply put, the date, size and numerous features of the ‘Ain Dara temple provide new evidence that chronologically anchors the Temple of Solomon in the cultural traditions of the tenth century B.C.E. The ‘Ain Dara temple thus corroborates the traditional date of Solomon’s renowned shrine.

Planning a Temple



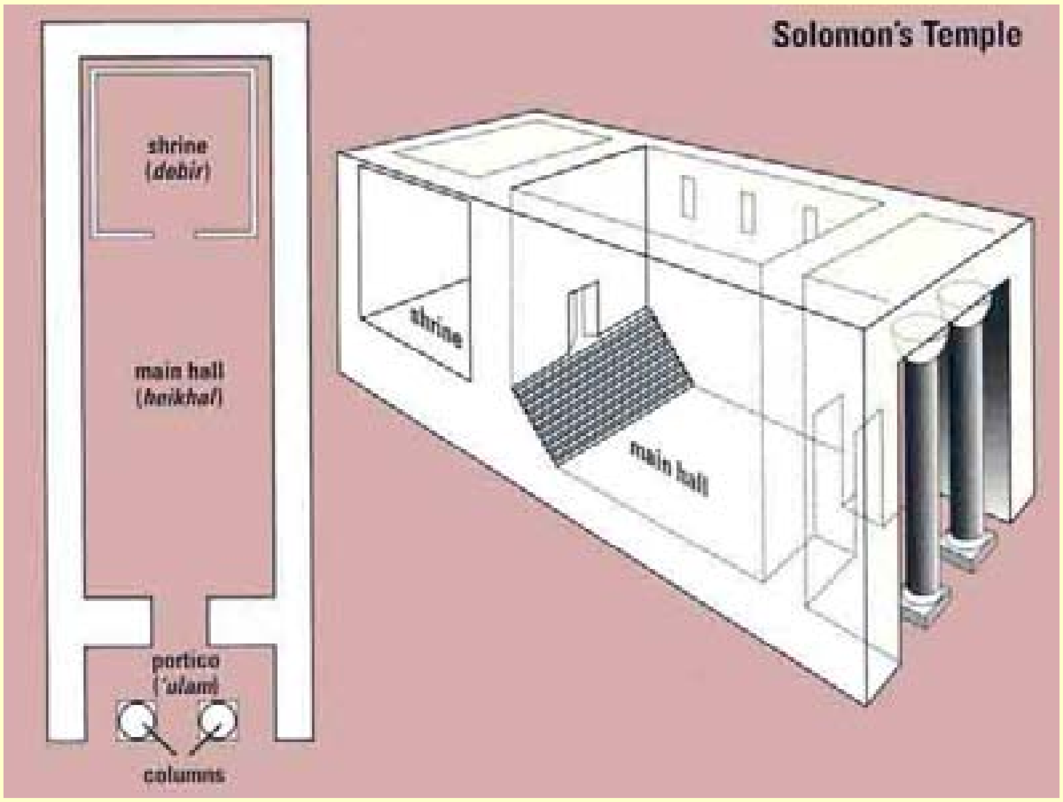
Plan of the 'Ain Dara temple.

A common architectural heritage is evident in the plans of Solomon's Temple and several other temples from northern Israel and Syria. Despite various surface differences, these buildings share the same basic three-room plan, known as the "long-room plan," which is thought to have derived from Syria in the second millennium B.C.E. before spreading south.

Each temple is entered through a portico formed by the extension of the temple's two side walls. Within each portico stood two columns, which probably supported the roof. At 'Ain Dara, the shallow portico leads into an antechamber, which in turn leads into the main hall. The other temples shown here had deeper porticos, which opened directly onto the main hall. At the back of each main hall is a shrine room, which could be a niche, as in the Late Bronze Age

(1550–1200 B.C.E.) temple at Hazor, in northern Israel; a separate room, as in the eighth-century temple at Tell Ta‘yinat, in northern Syria; a wooden cube set into the main hall, as in Solomon's Temple; or a screened-off podium, as at ‘Ain Dara. (The outside corridors that wrapped around three sides of the ‘Ain Dara and Solomonic temples are not depicted here.)

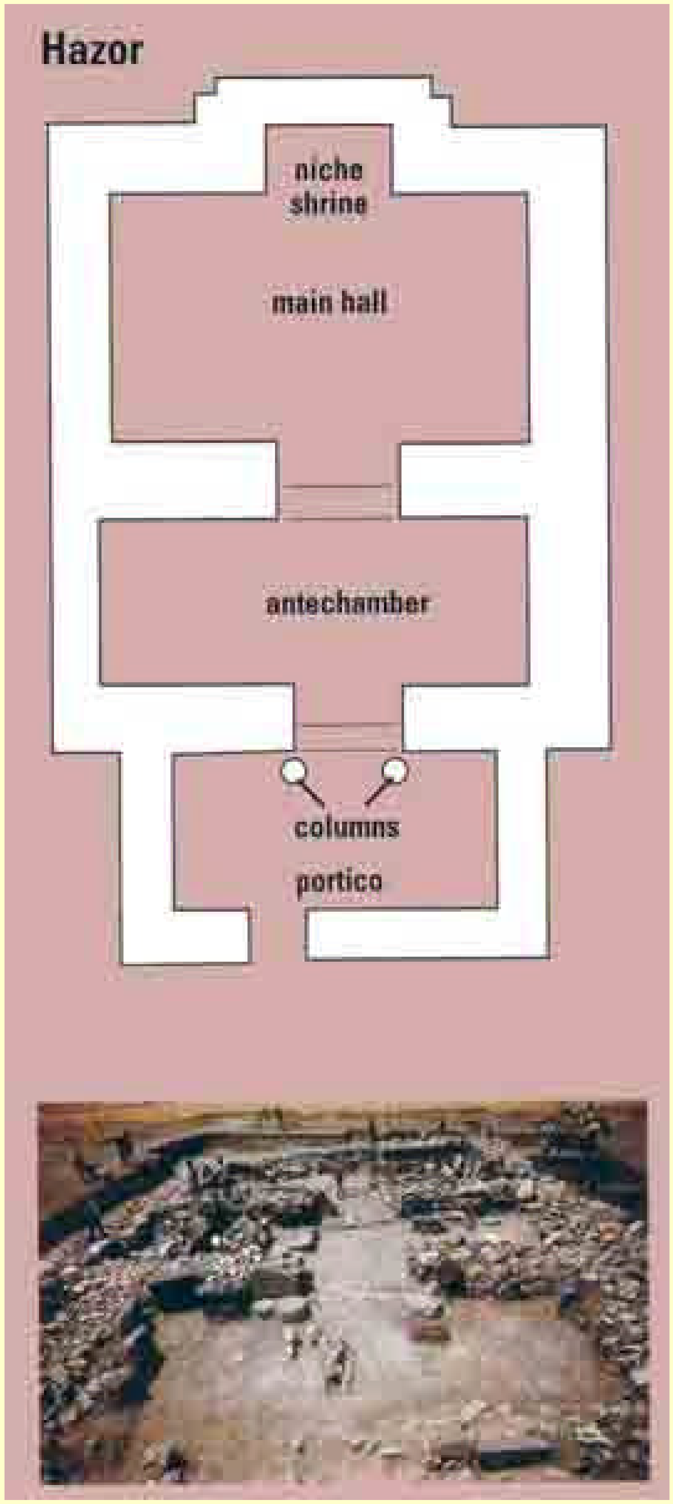
Solomon's Temple



Volkmar Fritz

Plan and reconstruction of Solomon's Temple.

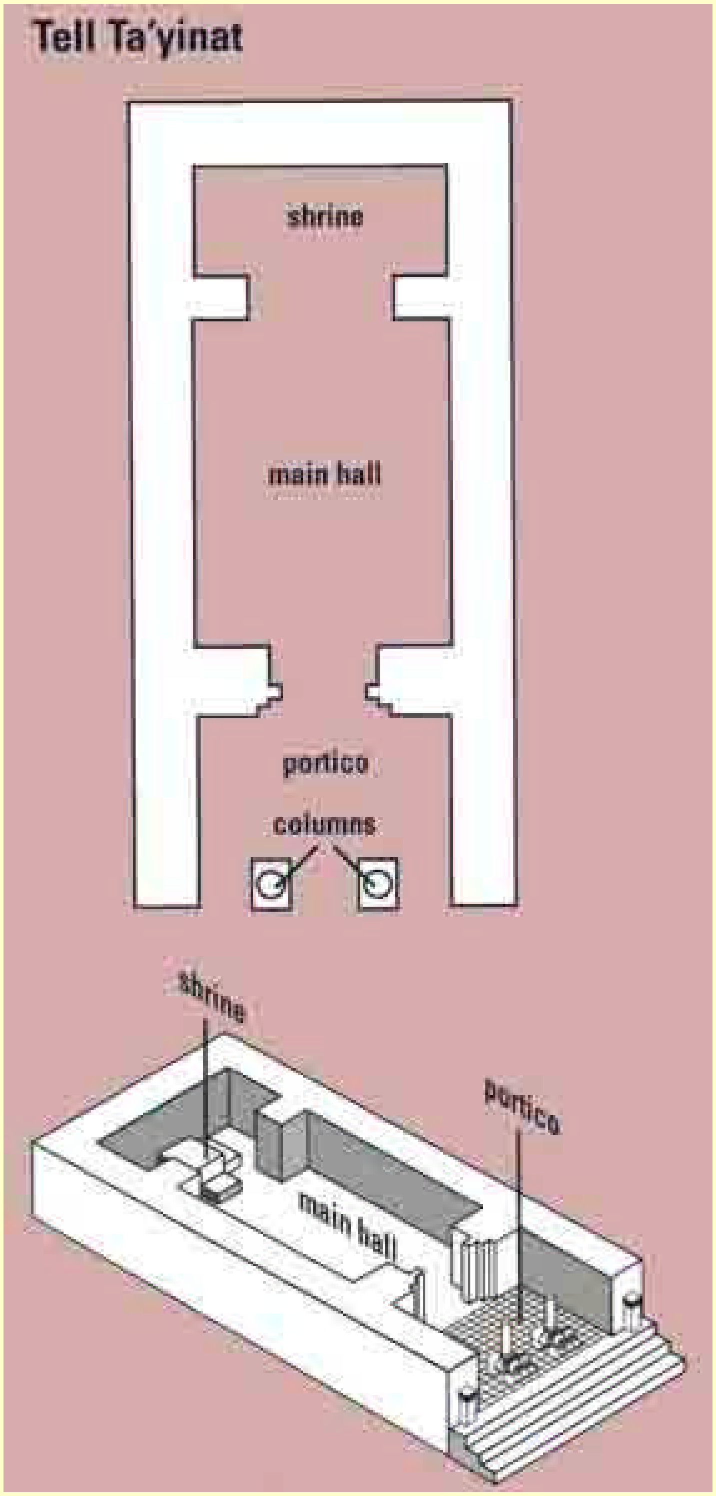
Hazor



Yigael Yadin Expedition to Hazor

Plan and photograph of the Hazor temple.

Tell Ta‘yinat



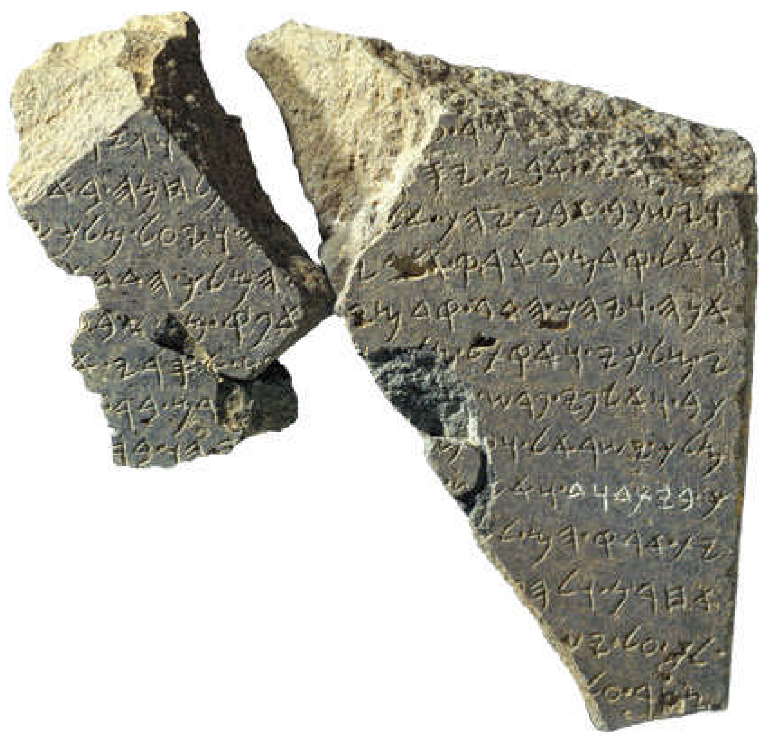
Leen Ritmeyer

Plan and reconstruction of the Tell Ta'yinat temple.

The Tel Dan ("David") Stela

"David" Found at Dan

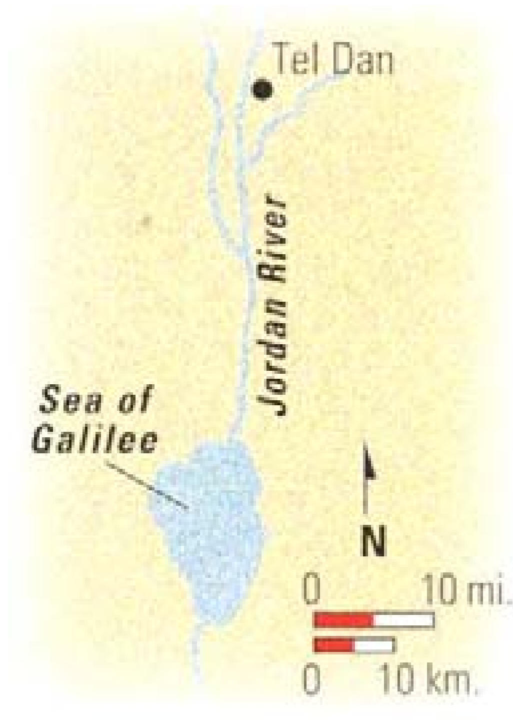
By BAR Staff



Zev Radovan/www.biblelandpictures.com

The fragmentary Tel Dan Stela provided the first extrabiblical evidence for the existence of King David. The Aramean king who erected the stela in the mid-ninth century B.C.E. claims to have defeated the "king of Israel" and the "king of the House of David."

It's not often that an archaeological find makes the front page of the *New York Times* (to say nothing of *Time* magazine). But that is what happened last summer to a discovery at Tel Dan, a beautiful mound in northern Galilee, at the foot of Mt. Hermon beside one of the headwaters of the Jordan River.[1]



Tel Dan lies by the headwaters of the Jordan River, near Israel's northern border.



Duby Tal

The Tel Dan excavation, seen in the foreground, began in 1966. Israel's longest ongoing dig, Tel Dan continues to produce remarkable discoveries. In the upper left, the foothills of Mt. Hermon rise from the cultivated plain.

There Avraham Biran and his team of archaeologists[2] found a remarkable inscription from the ninth century B.C.E. that refers both to the "House of David" and to the "King of Israel." This is the first time that the name David has been found in any ancient inscription outside the Bible. That the inscription refers not simply to a "David" but to the House of David, the dynasty of the great Israelite king, is even more remarkable.

"King of Israel" is a term frequently found in the Bible, especially in the Book of Kings. This, however, may be the oldest extrabiblical reference to Israel in Semitic script. If this inscription proves anything, it shows that both Israel and Judah, contrary to the claims of some scholarly Biblical minimizers, were important kingdoms at this time.

Together with his colleague Professor Joseph Naveh of the Hebrew University, Professor Biran promptly wrote a scientific report on the inscription, which was published in the *Israel Exploration Journal*.[3] This special article for **BAR** readers is based on that report and on other materials supplied by Professor Biran.



Courtesy Avraham Biran and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Mark of ownership. "Belonging to Amotz" says the inscription in paleo-Hebrew on this small sherd from a jar. Although this is the same name as the father of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 1:1), the name was fairly common in the eighth century B.C.E., the date of this sherd. The discovery of this inscription in 1966, the first year of the excavation at Tel Dan, raised expectations for the dig's future.

Let us start with some background. In the first season at Tel Dan—27 years ago, in 1966—Biran and his team uncovered on the slope of the mound a small potsherd incised with four letters in ancient Hebrew script. Although inscriptions are quite rare in excavations in Israel, the excavators were not really surprised. In the previous year, a ninth-century B.C.E. Aramaic inscription incised on the base of a bowl had been discovered quite by accident on the surface of the site. The late Professor Nahman Avigad, who published the inscription, read it as "of the butchers." The bowl on which it was inscribed had probably belonged to the cooks or butchers in the royal household of Dan.[4]





Courtesy Avraham Biran and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

"Of the butchers" says the Aramaic inscription on the 4-inch-wide base of this pottery bowl. Incised after the bowl was fired, the ninth-century B.C.E. inscription suggests that the bowl belonged to the butchers or cooks of the royal household at Dan. The bowl was found by accident on the surface of the mound the year before excavation began. The drawing (right) shows the inscription, with dashed lines indicating reconstructed portions.

The four-letter Hebrew inscription on the potsherd was dated to the eighth century B.C.E., about a century after the "butcher" inscription. The first letter is the common preposition meaning "belonging to"; the last three letters are a name: Amotz. This was the name of the father of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 1:1; 2 Kings 19:2; 2 Chronicles 26:22, etc.), who prophesied in the eighth century B.C.E. The jar did not belong to Isaiah's father—the name was fairly common—but the discovery of an eighth-century B.C.E. inscription with a well-known name naturally caused considerable excitement for the members of the expedition and raised hopes of finding more.





Courtesy Avraham Biran and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Unusually large Phoenician script, deeply incised before firing of the original vessel, forms the inscription on the potsherd at left. The inscription reads, "belonging to Baalpelet." The name means "may Baal rescue," referring to the pagan god Baal. It was excavated from a seventh-century B.C.E. building in 1968. Another ostracon with the letters l and □ together, probably the end of the same name, turned up 20 years later in the northern part of the mound (right). Whether this ostracon and sherd both refer to the same person, or whether it was simply a popular name remains unknown.

Two years later, in 1968, while excavating a seventh-century B.C.E. building, Biran found a sherd inscribed with seven letters in Phoenician script. It read “belonging to Baalpelet.” The name Baalpelet means “may Baal rescue.” As Baal was a pagan god, it is unlikely that Baalpelet the jar owner was an Israelite.

We have no idea who this Baalpelet was. Twenty years later, however, on the northern part of the mound, Biran found another ostracon inscribed with the letters *l* and □, probably the last letters of the same name. Baalpelet may have been a prominent member of the Dan community, if having two jars inscribed with his name is any indication. Alternatively, the name may simply have been popular in the seventh century B.C.E.

Eight years later, in 1976, in a disturbed level of occupation (thus, it cannot be precisely dated by stratigraphy), the Tel Dan team found an unusual bilingual inscription—in Greek and Aramaic—incised on a stone, mentioning the “God who is in Dan.” This inscription conclusively established that the site was Biblical Dan.



Courtesy Avraham Biran and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

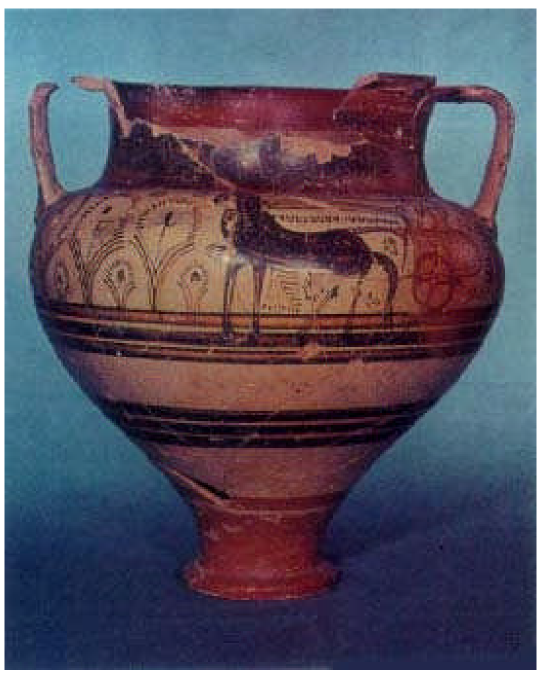
Definitely Dan. Professor Biran’s 1976 discovery of this 6-by-10-inch limestone tablet confirmed the identity of the site he was digging. The bilingual inscription in Greek (top three lines) and Aramaic (bottom line) refers to a person named Zoilos who made a vow to the “god who is in Dan,” or, in an alternative reading, to the “god of the Danites.” Found in Tel Dan’s sacred area, this votive inscription dates to the late third or early second centuries B.C.E. based on the style of the scripts.

Another ten excavation seasons passed without a hint of an inscription. Then, in 1986, in a layer of violent destruction attributed to the Assyrian conquest of northern Israel by Tiglath-pileser III in 733/732 B.C.E., a stamped jar handle was found. The seal that made the impression had belonged to someone named *Immadiyo*, that is, “God is with me.” The *-yo* element in the name is a shortened form of Yahweh (the personal name of the Israelite God) used in the

northern kingdom, Israel.[a] Immadiyo is thus a Yahwistic name that may reflect Immadiyo's, or his parents', devotion to the Israelite God.

In 1988, they uncovered another Yahwistic name on an eighth-century B.C.E. jar handle: *zkryo*, meaning "God (Yahweh) remembers" or "May God (Yahweh) remember." This is a very common name in the Bible, perhaps more easily recognizable by transliterating it with vowels: Zecharya or, even more recognizably, Zechariah or Zachariah (the same name in Hebrew). Another Biblical form of the name is Zecharyahu, especially in Judah. Young's Bible concordance lists 27 different men named Zechariah in the Bible, and two named Zachariah. In the New Testament, Zechariah was the name of John the Baptist's father (Luke 1).

One of the Biblical Zechariahs was the son of Jeroboam II; he succeeded his father to the throne of Israel (in about 753 B.C.E.) and held it for a bare six months. At that time Dan was included in the kingdom of Israel. It is tantalizing to imagine that perhaps the seal belonged to a king, King Zechariah of eighth-century B.C.E. Israel. The date of the seal impression and the date of the king's reign do seem to fit.



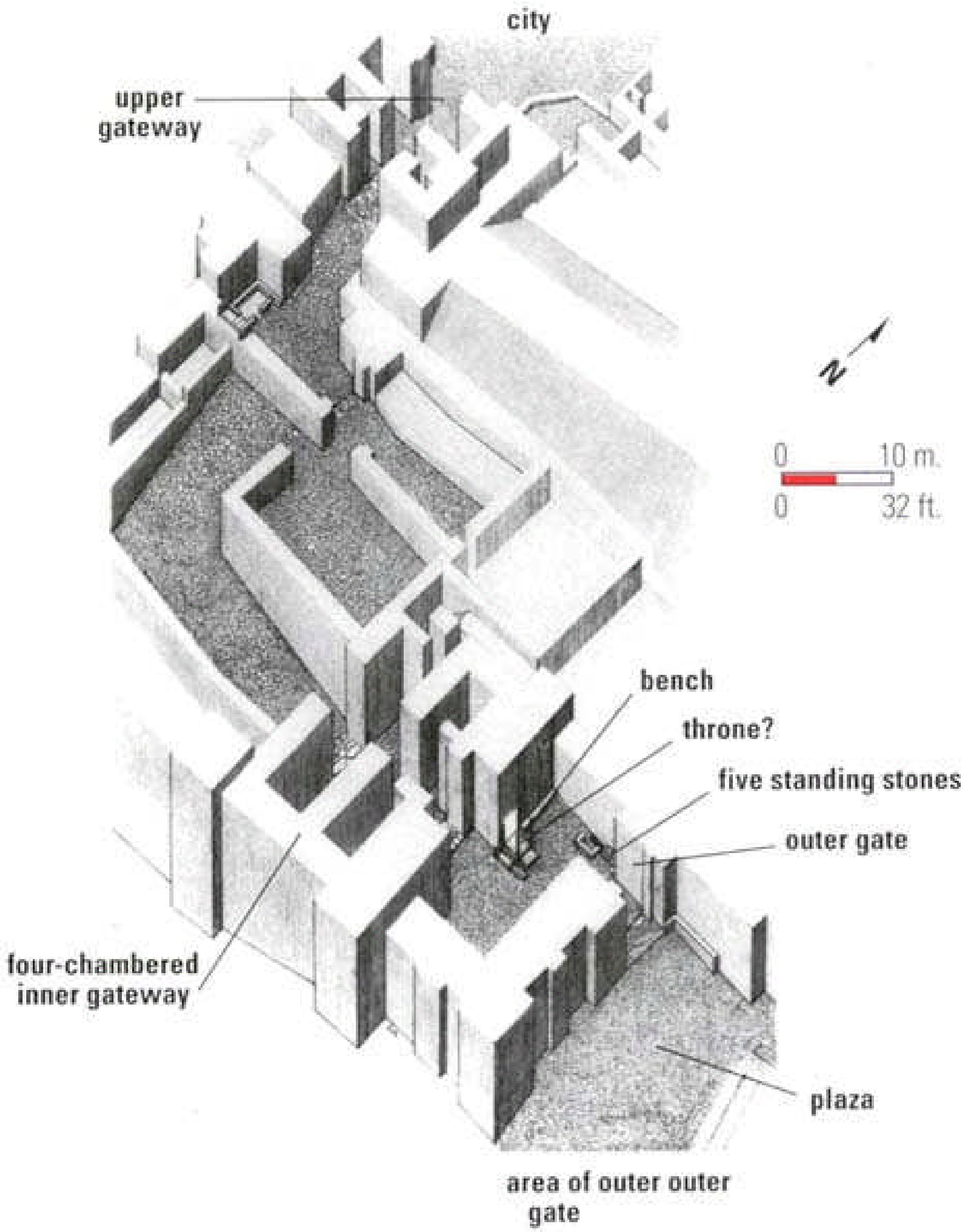
Courtesy Avraham Biran and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

A charioteer adorns this beautifully preserved krater, one of several Late Bronze Age Mycenaean imports found in a well-built tomb at Dan. Other funerary offerings included gold and silver jewelry, bronze swords and ivory cosmetic boxes. The tomb and its contents date to the heyday of Canaanite Dan (Laish) in the 14th or 13th century B.C.E.

In addition to these inscriptions, the Tel Dan team made many other important discoveries: the unique triple-arched gate, the Mycenaean tomb, the scepter head and the Israelite gate complex.[b] None was more dramatic, however, than the inscription uncovered last summer referring to the "House of David" and the "King of Israel."

In a sense the find can be attributed to the fact that the Israel Government Tourist Corporation and the Antiquities Authority had decided that Tel Dan was a site worthy of a major conservation and restoration project, so that, after nearly a generation of excavation, the site can be properly presented to visitors. As part of this project, which began in 1992, the archaeologists removed the debris from the eighth-century B.C.E. Assyrian destruction level—the destruction of Tiglath-pileser III, as previously mentioned—outside the city-gate complex. The purpose was simply to remove this destruction debris. But, as so often happens in an excavation, the unexpected occurred. As the destruction debris was being removed, a new ninth-century B.C.E. gate was uncovered; it formed an additional outer gate leading to the city-gate complex.

The previously known city-gate complex consisted of an outer gate that opened into a rectangular pavement (about 28 feet long and 65 feet wide), on the other side of which stood the major, or inner, gate. In this plaza, just as one approached the inner gate, a low platform had been uncovered several years ago. It had sockets at three of the four corners (the fourth socket was missing) that apparently once supported a canopy over the platform. The platform was probably either for the city's ruler, to greet a parade of dignitaries along a beautifully paved processional route, or a pedestal for the statue of a deity. To the right was a bench where perhaps the elders sat—to judge cases, to make deals or to welcome a royal procession.



A labyrinthine gate complex confronted the ancient visitor who wished to enter the Israelite city of Dan in the First Temple period, as shown in this isometric construction. After entering via the recently discovered outer outer gate and paved plaza, the visitor would pass through the outer gate into a small plaza containing five standing stones constituting a shrine and a low platform of hewn limestone blocks covered by a canopy, which may have served as a throne or held a cult statue. Next the visitor would pass through the four-chambered inner gate, which measures almost 100 feet wide and 60 feet through its passage and dates to the ninth century B.C.E. The two rooms on each side of the entryway probably housed the guards. Continuing to follow the pavement, the visitor would come at last to the 55-by-40-foot upper gate, beyond which lay the city itself.



Courtesy Avraham Biran and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

This low platform of hewn limestone blocks covered by a canopy may have served as a throne or held a cult statue. Round, carved, socketed bases—two beside the platform on the left and one on the right—indicate that posts were inserted into the holes to support the canopy over the platform. A presumed fourth base has disappeared. This platform may perhaps be explained by a passage in the Bible: "Then the king arose and took his seat in the gate … and all the people came before the king" (2 Samuel 19:8). To the right of the platform, a stone bench, perhaps for the elders of the city, lines the wall for about 16 feet.

In 1992, as part of the conservation-preservation project, Biran made an unexpected find when the layer of destruction in this area was removed. A decorated capital that may have adorned the top of one of the columns of the canopied structure above the platform was excavated.



Courtesy Avraham Biran and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Five small stones, perhaps Biblical *massebot*, stand in a niche against the city wall, just inside the outer gate. Large, well-hewn, rectangular blocks flank the standing stones, indicating that a structure may have sheltered the stones. The discovery of some 25 votive pottery vessels nearby supports the idea of a cultic function for these stones.

The next surprising find was a set of five standing stones in a niche just inside the outer gate. At either end of this row of standing stones lay large, carefully hewn, rectangular blocks. These blocks apparently belonged originally to part of the structure that sheltered the standing stones. The nature of these stones and their location—along the city wall in the plaza of the city-gate complex—together with a cache of some 25 pottery vessels found west of the standing stones, suggests that they may be sacred pillars, the *massebot* often mentioned in the Bible. This suggestion is further buttressed by the votive nature of the vessels: nine oil lamps, three of which have a pedestal and seven spouts; five three-legged cups (possibly for incense); four flat and five deep bowls; and numerous other stands. All of these artifacts are known to have cultic functions.



Courtesy Avraham Biran and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Drooping leaves, a motif well known from Assyrian ivories, decorate this limestone capital found in 1992. Another decorative element appears above the leaves. The capital may have adorned the top of a column supporting the canopied structure that protected the low platform between the outer and inner gates.

In short, this evidence suggests that the plaza between the outer and inner gates had a small “gateway” sanctuary that could be considered a *bamah* (often translated “high place”) of the kind mentioned in 2 Kings 23:1–20. That Biblical passage describes the seventh-century religious reforms instituted by King Josiah. Like King Hezekiah before him, Josiah wanted to centralize all worship of the Israelite God Yahweh in the Jerusalem Temple. To ensure this, Josiah destroyed the outlying *bamot* (plural of *bamah*). In this connection, the Biblical text specifically mentions “*bamot* of the gates” and one that was at the “entrance” (*petach*) of a gate (2 Kings 23:8). The *bamah* at Dan may have been this kind of structure.

In 1993, Biran and his team continued clearing the area outside the outer gate of the city-gate complex, because they knew that the paved plaza extended there, both to the east and to the south. There they uncovered approximately 475 square yards of pavement outside the outer city gate. Then on the east they hit a wall that had undergone considerable change, including the construction of a water channel through it in the Roman period. On the northern side of this wall, they found the "House of David/King of Israel" inscription, but that is getting ahead of the story.

South of this plaza outside the city-gate complex was a row of five unworked stones (one was missing). On either side of this row of stones lay a squared stone, on top of which was a stone pivot set inside the door socket. It seemed that they had discovered another gate, still farther out from the other one, and that this was its threshold. The two hemispherical stone pivots, made of local black basalt, once held square wooden doorposts, as reflected in the square hole in each of them. Thus the doors resting on the hemispherical pivots could be opened and closed with ease. The function of this new outer gate—an outer outer gate—is still unclear.

The biggest surprise was, of course, the inscription. The team's surveyor, Gila Cook, first noticed it. There, in secondary use in a wall, on the east side of the plaza, beneath an eighth-century B.C.E. destruction level, she saw a basalt stone protruding from the ground. As the rays of the afternoon sun glanced off this stone, Gila thought she saw letters on it and called Biran over. When he bent down to look at the stone, he exclaimed: "Oh, my God, we have an inscription!" The stone was easily removed and, when turned toward the sun, the letters sprang to life. In their words, "It was an unforgettable moment."

The piece of basalt was a fragment of what must have been a large monumental inscription. The sidebar "New Inscription May Illuminate Biblical Events" contains a drawing of the 13-line inscription, a transcript in modern Hebrew letters and an English translation. [The sidebar discusses the largest fragment of the inscription, discovered in 1993. Two smaller but adjoining fragments were discovered the following season. All three pieces are shown together on the first page of the article.—**Ed.**] In the translation, the words and letters in brackets have been reconstructed on the basis of surviving parts of the inscription. A dot over a letter in the modern Hebrew transcription indicates that the letter has only partially survived.

Parts of 13 lines have been preserved, but not a single one is complete. In the first line, only three letters have survived. In the second line are five letters and part of a sixth; in the last line, only five letters; and the widest line has a mere 14 letters.

On the other hand, the surviving letters are clearly engraved and easy to read. The script is in Old Hebrew letters, sometimes called paleo-Hebrew, the kind of letters used before the Babylonian destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E. When the Jews returned from the Babylonian exile, they brought back the square Aramaic script still used today.

Dots separate the words, as was then customary. In line 9, where “House of David” appears, however, the two Hebrew words *bytdwd* are not separated by a dot, but written together, like HouseofDavid. The dynastic name of the kingdom of Judah, whose founder was King David, was apparently regarded as one word.

Note that the first letter (farthest to the right) in line 9, just before the reference to the House of David, is the last letter of *melech*, the Hebrew word for king, so the previous line probably ended with the other two letters of the word for king. In short, there was probably a reference to “the king of the House of David.” Perhaps the missing part even gave his name.

In line 8 is a reference to *melech yisrael*, the king of Israel, so the text mentions both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah and the king of each. Unfortunately, the kings’ names, if they were ever there, have not survived.

In line 5, however, is the name Hadad. Hadad was a storm god, especially popular among the Arameans east of the Jordan. “Hadad went in front of me,” the text reads. This is apparently a victory stela erected in Dan by an Aramean king devoted to Hadad.

Line 4 reads: “ … rael formerly in my father’s land.” Apparently the two letters that were at the end of line 3 were “Is” so that the original text read “Israel formerly in my father’s land.” There may even have been a reference to the cities of Israel.

In lines 6 and 7, the author of the text boasts that he “slew [some apparently large number of] chariots and 2,000 horsemen.” Then the following lines contain references to the king of Israel and, presumably, the king of the House of David.

Thus this appears to be a victory stela erected in Dan by an Aramean, a devotee of Hadad, who is boasting of his military victory over Israel and perhaps also Judah. That this is an Aramean victory stela is confirmed by the fact that the language is Early Aramaic, related to, but slightly different from, Hebrew. The author of the text was probably not the Aramean king, but rather a military commander of the king’s, because in line 6 we find a reference to “my king.” On the other hand, lines 2 and 3 refer to “my father” and line 4 refers to “my father’s land,” indicating

royalty of some sort. Perhaps the military commander who erected the stela was himself a royal personage, possibly a king who was subordinate to the king of Aram who ruled from Damascus. The Bible actually mentions two such subordinate kingdoms, Maacah (2 Samuel 10:6,8; 1 Chronicles 19:7) and Rehob (2 Samuel 10:8). Although Maacah and Rehob were more than a hundred years before the Dan stela was written, these kingdoms may still have existed in the period of the stela.

In 1 Kings 15:16–22 (a parallel account appears in 2 Chronicles 16:1–6), we learn of a war between King Baasha of Israel and King Asa of Judah. Asa took all the gold and silver from the Jerusalem Temple and from his own palace and presented it to Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, as a gift, with a note requesting Ben-Hadad's help. Ben-Hadad responded by attacking cities in the northern kingdom of Israel, and captured several of them, including Dan (1 Kings 15:20).

Does this Biblical episode provide the historical background of the Dan stela? Did Ben-Hadad, the Aramean, erect this victory stela after capturing Dan?

The answer depends on (1) whether the date of the stela is contemporaneous with this episode, and (2) whether the two texts "fit" with one another.

The Biblical episode can be dated to the first half of the ninth century B.C.E., about 885. (Baasha's reign extended from 906 to 883 and Asa's reign from 908 to 867.)

How was the stela dated to the ninth century B.C.E.? One way to date the inscription is paleographically—by the shape and stance of the letters. On this basis, Joseph Naveh dated the inscription to the ninth century. The evidence comes from other inscriptions that have been previously dated. In the ninth century, Aramaic script and Phoenician script had not yet gone their separate ways, so comparisons to inscriptions in both scripts are relevant. Unfortunately, however, most extant ninth-century inscriptions, like the famous Mesha stela, which is most similar to the Dan inscription, come from the latter half of that century. Only the Phoenician Nora inscription[c] and an inscription from Cyprus come from the early ninth century. So, the Dan inscription can be dated paleographically to about the middle of the century, but might fall within a range of some decades earlier or later.

An archaeological analysis, however, suggests a date in the first half of the ninth century. The stela fragment that bears the inscription was used in a wall that was destroyed by Tiglath-pileser III in 733/732 B.C.E., so the stela must have been erected before this date. But that doesn't help much.

The pottery from the level beneath the stela fragment narrows the range. While the amount of pottery found there was small, none of it was later than the first half of the ninth century! This suggests that the stela was broken up around that time, so that it would have been erected sometime during the first half of the ninth century B.C.E. It must have stood at least some time before being destroyed and used secondarily in the wall. A date early in the ninth century fits nicely with the date of the Biblical episode (about 885 B.C.E.).

But an examination of the two accounts—the one in the Bible and the other on the fragmentary inscription—suggests caution. Obviously, the reconstruction of the text presents many difficulties and many possibilities. Note that in line 9, Naveh and Biran have reconstructed an "I" before "slew," so that the author of the text does the slaying. That is their best guess, although other reconstructions are possible. If the reconstruction of "I" is correct, it appears that the author of the victory stela is claiming a victory over Judah (the House of David), who is his enemy, as well as over Israel. If that is so, it would conflict with the Biblical episode, in which the Aramean king was allied with the king of Judah, having been bribed with a gift of gold and silver. Thus the stela may be describing some other military engagement in which both Judah and Israel were allied against Aram.

There were probably several battles or wars in the ninth century B.C.E. between Aram and Israel. Not all were recorded in the Bible. Indeed, several other possibilities are mentioned in the Bible.[5] For the time being, the matter must remain in the realm of learned conjecture.

In any event, at some point Israel must have regained control of Dan, perhaps when King Ahab rebuilt the city after its destruction by Ben-Hadad I in 885 B.C.E. When the Israelites regained control of the city, the Aramean victory stela was destroyed. The only thing we can be sure of is that it was broken and that one of the fragments was used in a wall bordering a plaza in the city-gate complex.

As stated earlier, this is now the oldest extant Semitic reference to Israel. The "king of Israel" is also referred to in the famous Mesha stela, which, according to most experts, dates to later in the ninth century. The immensely important Merneptah Stele, dated to 1207 B.C.E., also refers to Israel, but the text is in hieroglyphic. The Tel Dan inscription is therefore the oldest appearance in Semitic script of the name Israel—at least for now. Who knows when a new inscription that challenges this claim will be found.

New Inscription May Illuminate Biblical Events



Courtesy Avraham Biran and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

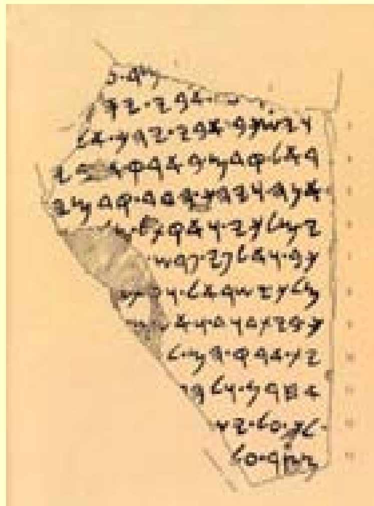
Tel Dan surveyor Gila Cook first spotted the "House of David" inscription in the glancing rays of the afternoon sun. She called over excavation director Avraham Biran, who, when he saw it, exclaimed, "Oh, my God, we have an inscription!" The photos show the fragmentary stela as it was found (above) and shortly after removal (below).



Courtesy Avraham Biran and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Broken in antiquity and reused as building material, the stela lay in a wall beneath the eighth-century B.C.E. destruction debris from Tiglath-pileser III's conquest. The inscription's 13 partially preserved lines in the Early Aramaic language, written in paleo-Hebrew script of the ninth century B.C.E., uses dots to separate the words (drawing, below). Based on associated pottery

fragments and evidence from the inscription itself, Professor Biran suggests the stela was erected in the first half of the ninth century B.C.E. Biran and his colleagues continue to search for additional fragments of the stela.



Ada Yardeni



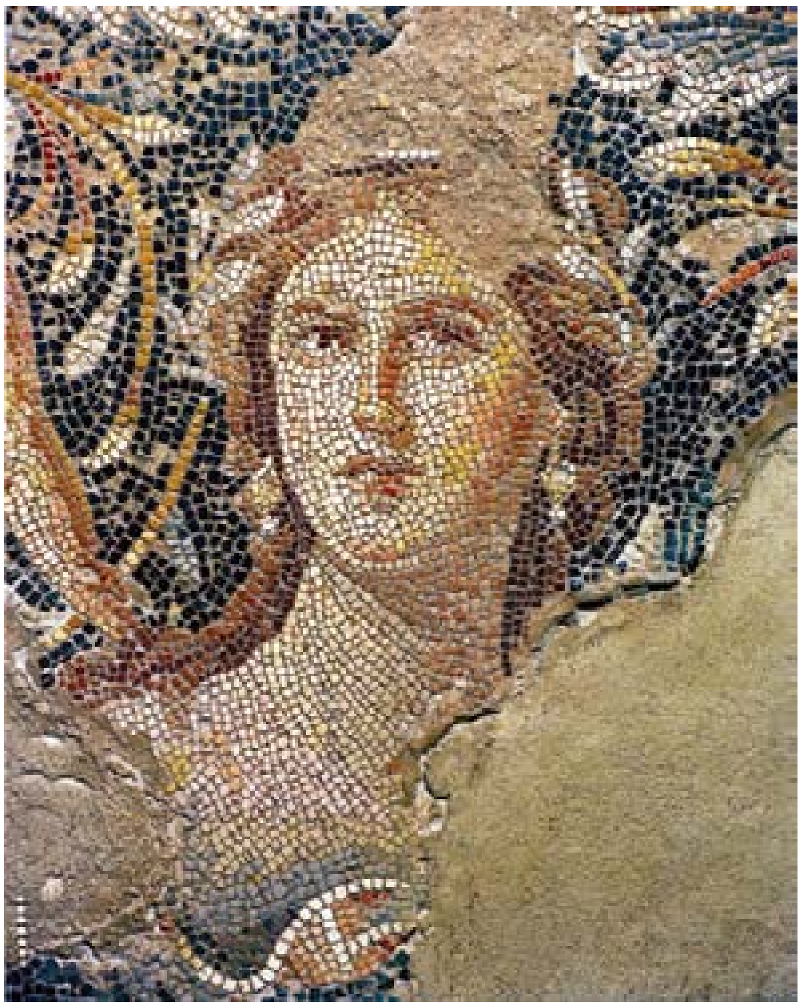
Transcription		Translation
[illegible]	(1)	...
[illegible]	(2)	... my father went up
[illegible]	(3)	... and my father died, he went to [his fate ... Is-]
[illegible]	(4)	rael formerly in my father's land ...
[illegible]	(5)	I [fought against Israel?] and Hadad went in front of me ...
[illegible]	(6)	... my king. And I slew of [them X footmen, Y cha-]
[illegible]	(7)	riots and two thousand horsemen ...
[illegible]	(8)	the king of Israel. And [I] slew [... the kin-]
[illegible]	(9)	g of the House of David. And I put ...
[illegible]	(10)	their land ...
[illegible]	(11)	other ... [... ru-]
[illegible]	(12)	led over Is[rael ...]
[illegible]	(13)	siege upon ...

In the translation, the material in brackets represents suggested reconstructions. Fortunately, the phrases “House of David” (the dynastic name of the kingdom of Judah) and “king of Israel” (often used without a specific name in the Books of Kings) need no reconstruction. The inscription seems to commemorate the victory of an Aramean king over the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. One of the Aramean king’s military commanders probably erected the stela, for it speaks of “my king” (line 6). In view of the date and the location in Galilee, among other factors, the stela may describe events in the war of Ben Hadad I against King Baasha of Israel in 885 B.C.E. (1 Kings 15:16–22; 2 Chronicles 16:1–6). In any case, it shows that Israel and Judah were important kingdoms in the ninth century B.C.E. When the Israelites reconquered Dan, they apparently destroyed the stela and used its pieces in the wall.

Mona Lisa of the Galilee

Mosaic Masterpiece Dazzles Sepphoris Volunteers

By BAR Staff



Joint Sepphoris Project/Eric and Carol Meyers

This richly colored mosaic portrait of an unnamed woman was discovered among the ruins of the Roman city of Sepphoris in the Galilee. The enchanting tilt of her head and near-smile earned her the nickname "Mona Lisa of the Galilee."

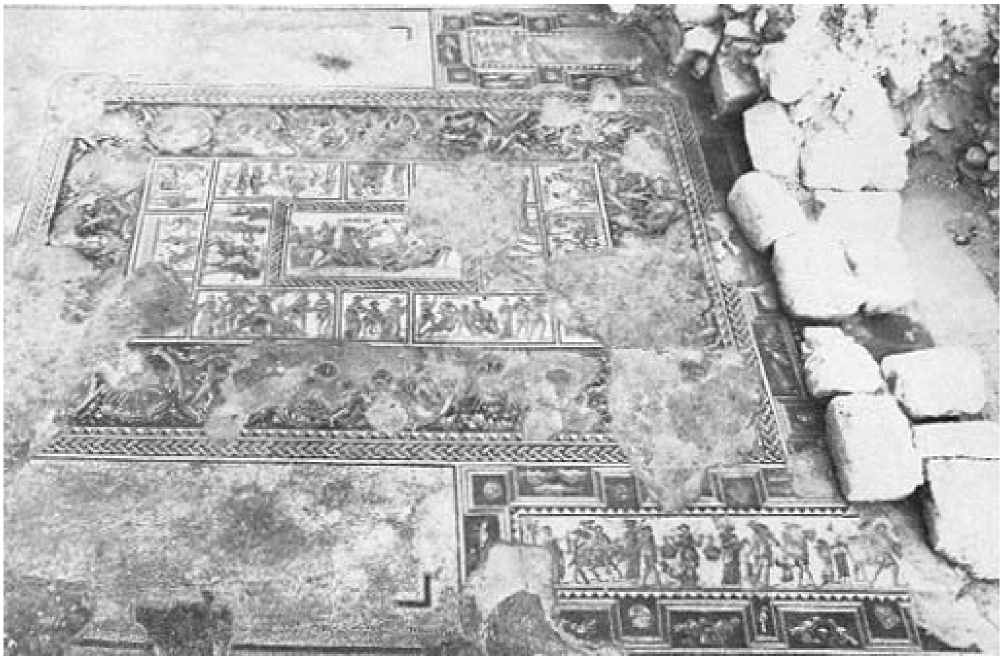


Courtesy Sepphoris Excavations

Depicting scenes from the life of the Greek god Dionysus, two of the 15 panels in the mosaic carpet are clearly visible. In the right corner we see the drunken Dionysus with a Greek inscription that says "drunkenness." On the left is a procession with chariot and a pipe-playing musician; the Greek inscription reads "procession."

On the final few days of last season's dig at Sepphoris in the Galilee, the fortunate volunteers who stayed to the end exposed a 23-by-40-foot area of a huge mosaic floor. The floor dates to the third century C.E., according to the archaeologists.

Set in the white ground of the mosaic floor at one end—like a beautiful rug—is a 20-by-20-foot area of colored mosaic. The colored area consists of a rectangle flanked along part of its length on two sides by panels illustrating processions. The processional on one side is quite intact, depicting people carrying agricultural produce. The large rectangular section of the mosaic includes three center panels surrounded by 12 rectangles, probably representing scenes from the life of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and revelry. Each of the separate scenes is labeled with a Greek inscription. The scenes include Dionysus engaged in a drinking competition with Hercules, the marriage of the god, and a number of scenes showing Dionysus with Pan, god of music and shepherds.



The complete colored mosaic at Sepphoris. Surrounding 15 central rectangular panels is a broad decorative border. Although much of it is damaged beyond recognition, remarkably, the exquisite woman's face is completely intact in the center of the border, at far left. Also preserved almost in its entirety is the long mosaic panel in the foreground containing a procession of people bearing agricultural produce.

A border of medallions formed by trailing acanthus leaves surrounds the 15 panels. Within most of the medallions appear animals in hunting or fighting scenes.

In one of the medallions, centered at one end of the rectangular "carpet," is the most exquisite feature of the mosaic—an elegant, delicately shaded portrait of a woman crowned with a wreath. The captivating woman was once matched on the opposite side by another portrait—now destroyed.



The lovely lady from Sepphoris. The beckoning tilt to her head and her wide-eyed gaze captivate us even after 17 centuries. Here we see her, in context, surrounded by acanthus vines that also enclose a small cupid-like figure.

The quality of the mosaic woman is extremely high, as reflected in the tiny stone tessarae (4–5 mm square) in a wide range of natural stone colors. Using these colored stones, the mosaic artist portrayed subtle variations between her bright earrings, the trim on her garment, the sheen on her lips and the flush on her cheeks.

Approximately 15 percent intact, the floor was discovered in a remarkably well-preserved building with walls standing as high as 6 feet in some places and with some plastered surfaces decorated with frescoes.

Sepphoris was probably destroyed by an earthquake in 363 C.E. The mosaic floor was protected because it was in a building built into a hill. As a result of the earthquake, the mosaic was buried and left undisturbed beneath the rubble that fell from above. The building, originally two stories high, possibly served as the governor's palace or residence. The room with the mosaic was probably a banquet room, or triclinium, where diners reclined on couches around the mosaic floor.

Sepphoris—the chief city of the region from about the first century B.C.E. to the fifth century C.E.—was a mixed community of pagan Romans, Christians and Jews. Important as a Jewish spiritual center, Sepphoris was the home of Rabbi Judah the Prince (Judah ha-Nasi), patriarch and leader of the Sanhedrin, the central body of Jewish legal and spiritual authority during Roman times. It was in Sepphoris that Rabbi Judah compiled the Mishnah[a] in about 200 C.E.

Archaeological evidence of the close relations between Jews and Romans at Sepphoris in the third century is the proximity of contemporaneous Jewish structures to the palace containing the Dionysus mosaic. This closeness is also suggested by a talmudic legend—actually from a Babylonian folktale—that tells of an unidentified Roman emperor who was so smitten with the wisdom of Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi that he exclaimed, "Would that I served as a mattress for thee in the world to come."

As early as the First Jewish Revolt against Rome in 66 C.E., the Jews of Sepphoris demonstrated their special affinity to Rome by refusing to take up arms against the Romans. Flavius Josephus, the historian who lived and wrote in those times, described the residents of Sepphoris as "the only people of that province who displayed pacific sentiments. For with an eye to their own security and a sense of the power of Rome they offered a cordial welcome to the commander-in-chief and promised their active support against their own countrymen."

The lovely mosaic floor adds a new dimension to what we know about Sepphoris. Formerly understood as the spiritual and agricultural center of the Galilee, Sepphoris may now also be seen as a center—or at least a major consumer—of pagan art.

Next season's volunteers will complete excavation of the triclinium as well as the entire palatial building. Codirector Ehud Netzer guardedly expresses the hope that the 1988 season will uncover more finds as startling as the mosaic that was the prize of the 1987 season. The excavation at Sepphoris is sponsored jointly by Duke and Hebrew Universities and is codirected by Netzer from the Hebrew University and Carol and Eric Meyers from Duke.

"Yahweh and His Asherah"
The Kuntillet 'Ajrud Ostraca

Did Yahweh Have a Consort?

By Ze'ev Meshel



Dr. Z. Meshel and A. Hai

An inscription, preserved on an inscribed potsherd (or ostracon) from the site of Kuntillet 'Ajrud in the Sinai, makes reference to "Yahweh and his Asherah," suggesting that some Israelites believed their God had a wife. (See artist's rendering right.)

The ostracon shows a large cow-eared figure standing on the left and a seated lyre-player on the right. In the center is a drawing of the god Bes. Bes, originally an Egyptian demi-god, is recognized by his arms akimbo and his characteristic headdress. The figures on the left have exposed genitals or tails. The inscription above the two left hand figures includes the enigmatic words *asherah* ("consort", "holy of holies," or "tree-symbol") and *shomron* ("guard" or "the city of Shomron"). If the correct reading is "consort," two of the three figures may represent Yahweh and his consort.

The Book of Kings describes a time during the ninth–seventh centuries B.C.E. when the land was divided into two kingdoms—Judah in the south and Israel in the north. Phoenicia and Israel were linked by commerce and royal marriages and Hebrew monotheism struggled to resist the attraction of pagan gods. The prophets Elijah, Elisha, Amos and Isaiah inveighed against transgressions. At Kuntillet 'Ajrud, a remote desert way-station in the wilderness of northern Sinai, we found evidence of the multiplicity of religious practices which provoked the prophets' fury.



Avraham Hai, Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University

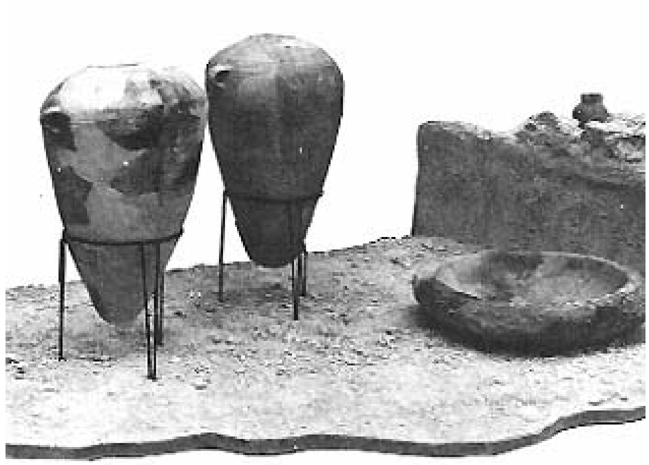
The Mound of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud. A bedouin woman walks across the barren floor of the Wadi Quraiya, possibly on her way to the “solitary springs” which gave the tell its Arabic name. On top of the isolated hill, in the remains of a small building, Ze’ev Meshel found an unexpected collection of religious drawings and inscriptions left by early-eighth-century B.C.E. traders.

In three short seasons of excavation in 1975 and 1976, we uncovered a remarkable (and completely unexpected) collection of ancient Hebrew and Phoenician inscriptions painted on plaster walls and large storage jars and incised on stone vessels. When the inscriptions were read, we discovered that they provided clear evidence that Kuntillet ‘Ajrud was not merely a resting place for desert travelers but was principally a religious center. The inscriptions contain the names of El and Yahweh, words for God used in the Hebrew Bible. Yahweh (spelled YHWH in Hebrew consonantal writing) is the holy name of the Hebrew God as it appears in the Bible. El, a generic term for God, is also used in the Bible to refer specifically to the Hebrew God.

But the religious inscriptions from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud also contain the names of pagan gods and goddesses, like Baal and Asherah. Both the travelers who stopped at this desert religious center and its few inhabitants were not all dedicated to the pure monotheistic principles espoused by the Hebrew prophets of their day. Some of these people may have been syncretistic Israelites mixing their Yahwistic principles with pagan influences. Others may have been Phoenicians—we also found some Phoenician inscriptions. Still others may have been pagans of other beliefs.

The most spectacular of the finds were two large pithoi (singular: pithos) or storage jars. Each of these storage jars is over 3 feet high and weighs (empty) almost 30 pounds. Although both pithoi were found in fragments, they proved to be almost completely restorable. On the outside of each of these pithoi were several crude, folk-art drawings in red and black ink as well

as a number of religious inscriptions. Two of these pictures may even be Yahweh and his consort—a blasphemous concept never before suggested by an archaeological discovery!



Avraham Hai, Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University

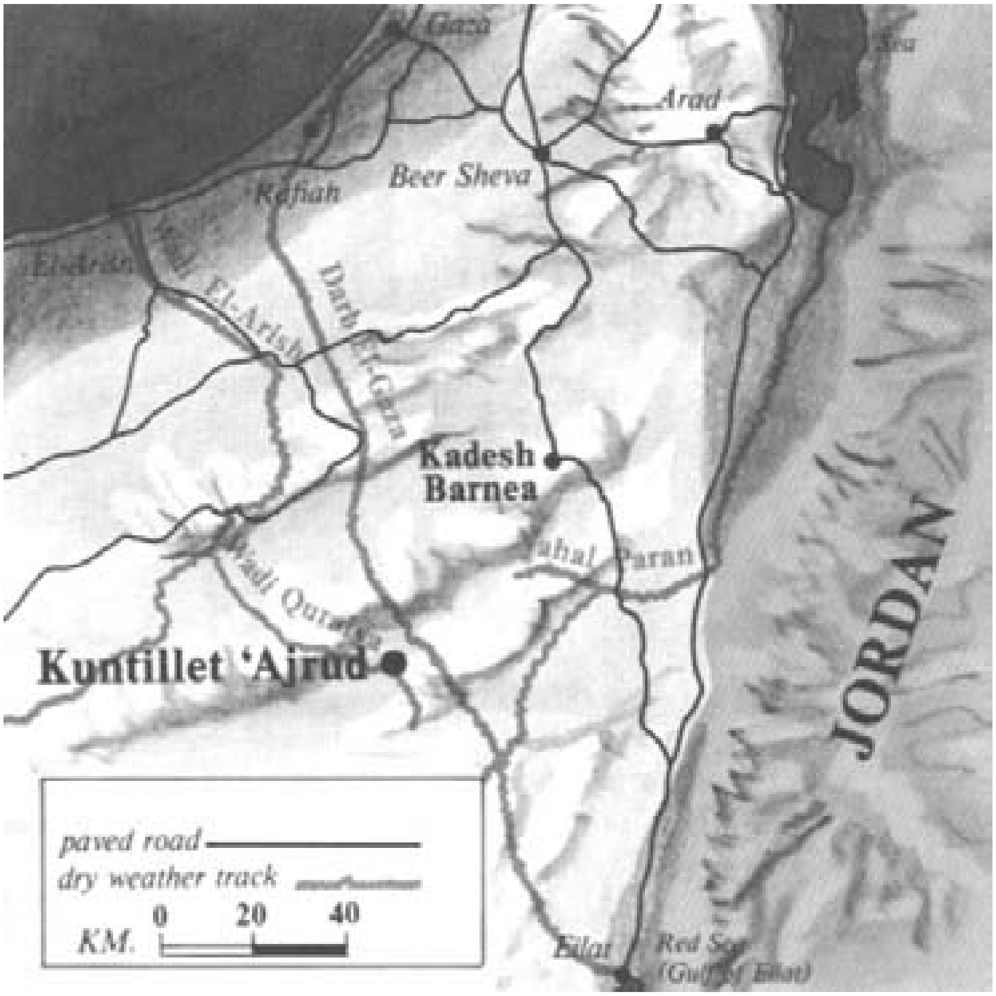
The two large pithoi, bearing drawings and inscriptions, on display in the Israel Museum next to the 400 pound stone bowl.

The first announcement and photographs of the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud finds were published in the March 1976 issue of **BAR** (“Cache of Hebrew and Phoenician Inscriptions Found in the Desert”). This early account promised **BAR** readers a more complete report in the future. Here is that report—including some pictures never before published.

The report has been longer in coming than I expected because the words and drawings are faded and enigmatic. What I present here are tentative conclusions and alternative hypotheses about material which I, and other scholars, will be studying for years to come.

Kuntillet ‘Ajrud is located about 40 miles south of Kadesh-Barnea and sits on a hill which rises beside the Wadi Quraiya.[a] Old maps reveal that the site is a crossroads of desert tracks: one leads from Gaza through Kadesh-Barnea to Eilat; another traverses the Sinai along the Wadi Quraiya; and a third branches off to the south via Temed, a well-known way station in later times, to the center of southern Sinai.

The site was discovered by the famous English explorer Edward Palmer who surveyed the Sinai Peninsula in the 1860s and visited ‘Ajrud in 1869. There he carried out a small sounding into the ancient remains and subsequently identified the site as Gypsaria, a site known from Roman sources as a station on the Roman road from Gaza to Eilat.

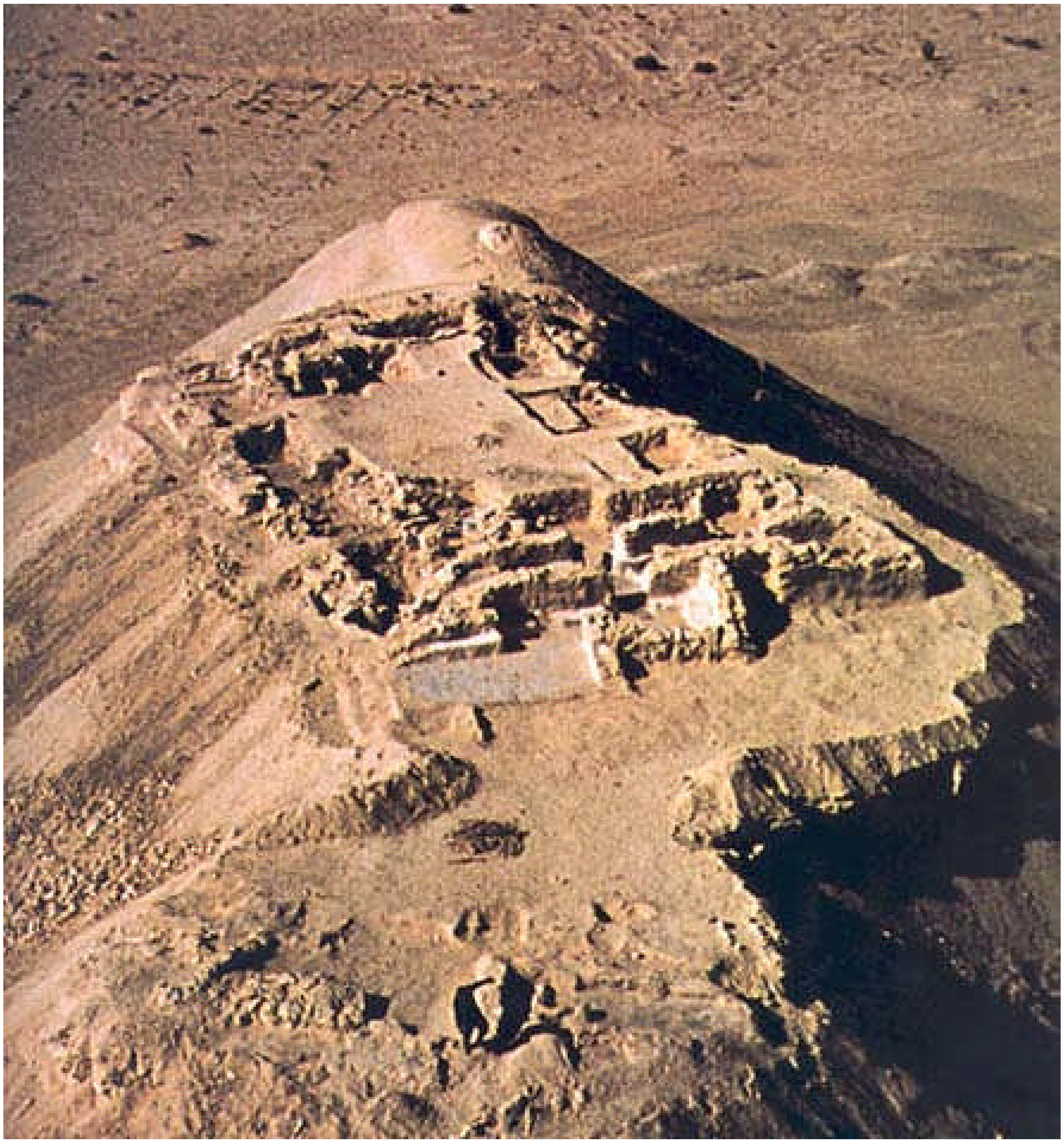


Avraham Hai, Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University

Map showing location of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud.

But since Palmer’s day archaeologists have learned a great deal about pottery dating. After the 1967 Six-Day War we came to the site and by examining the sherds which lay strewn about we were able to detect Palmer’s error easily and to date the site to Iron Age II or the Israelite period. This new date identified the site as the southernmost outpost of the Judean kingdom, and it became a prime candidate for excavation. A few years later I led the archaeological expedition to Kuntillet ‘Ajrud on behalf of Tel Aviv University (Institutes of Archaeology, and of Nature Conservation Research); the Israel Department of Antiquity; the Department for Holy-Land Studies in the Kibbutz Movement and the Israel Exploration Society.

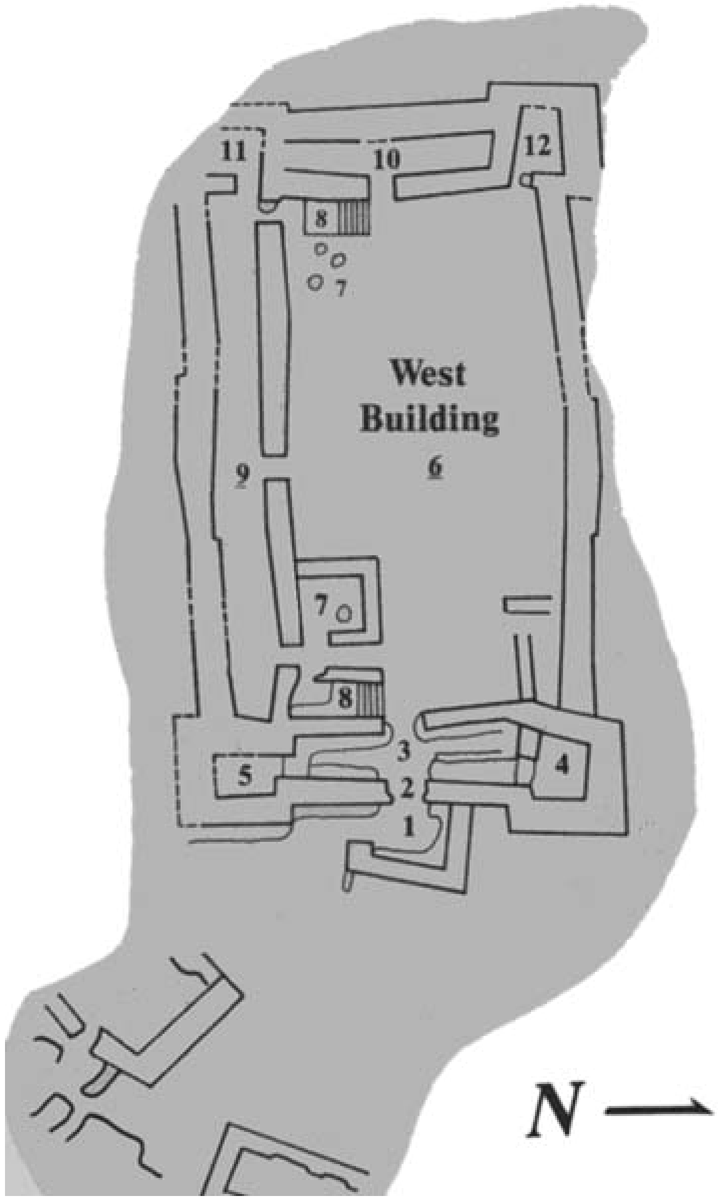
The top of the hill comprising the site is an oblong plateau extending east-west, with the ruins located at its western end. Wells in the vicinity—in use even today—gave the site its ancient importance. The modern Arabic name Kuntillet ‘Ajrud means “Solitary Hill of the Wells,” a name which accurately reflects its character.



Avraham Hai, Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University

The ruined walls of the rectangular west building at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud occupy most of the summit of the hill. Closest to the observer is the entryway and immediately beyond is the benchroom with its small square storage room at either end (seen most clearly on the right side). In the foreground are fragments of walls and all that remains of another building that disappeared when the hill eroded.

The site contains the remains of only two structures: a main building at the western extremity of the plateau and a smaller building east of it (see plan). The two buildings are in very different states of preservation. Almost nothing is left of the small building on the east, and there is little to say of it. The main building, whose walls have survived to a height of 5 feet, measures approximately 75 by 45 feet, and takes up the whole width of the narrow plateau.



Avraham Hai, Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University

This plan of the Kuntillet 'Ajrud cult center enables the reader to identify the building's outer court (1), entrance (2), benchroom (3), two small rooms (4 and 5) entered from windows at either end of the benchroom, inner court (6), ovens (7), stairs (8), storage rooms (9 and 10) and tower-like corner rooms (11 and 12).

The entrance to this building is from the east, through a small court with stone benches along the walls. Fragments of frescoes found amidst the debris on the floor of the entrance indicate that parts of the walls were painted with colorful floral motifs and linear designs. An entryway led from the small entrance court to a broad, narrow room, which we call the "benchroom.". Both the benchroom and the entry had benches along the walls and were plastered all over with white, shiny plaster.



Avraham Hai, Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University

Benchroom at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud. Most of the plaster and pottery bearing inscriptions and drawings were found here. Travelers probably deposited their offerings here when they stopped at this desert way-station. The entryway to the building is in the middle of the benchroom, on the right, and the entrance to the inner courtyard is opposite, on the left. At either end of the white-plastered benchroom was a doorless storage room, where old offerings were placed when the benchroom became overcrowded.

The benchroom extends across the width of the building. The benches along the walls on each side of the entranceway take up most of the floor space, leaving only a narrow passage between them. At either end of the benchroom is a window-like opening into a small room. The sills of these windows are formed by the benches immediately adjacent; the windows are the only openings or entrances into the small rooms at the ends of the benchroom.

Strangely enough, the inner courtyard of the building—to which we pass from the benchroom—was empty except for three ovens found in each of the southern corners, indicating that this was probably the cooking area. The three ovens could not have been used simultaneously because the floor level of each oven overlapped the dome of the one below. It is hard to tell how long each oven was in use, but together, the three ovens probably functioned as long as the total life of the site, which may have been no more than one generation. Steps were found in the southern corners and probably formed part of staircases leading to the roof.

To the south and west of the courtyard were two long rooms. In the floor, bases of *pithoi*, or storage jars, were firmly embedded and so closely spaced that it must have been difficult to pass between them. There is no doubt that these rooms were used for storing food.

Tower-like corner rooms were found in the western corners of the building. Access to these rooms is from the courtyard. At the rear of each room is a small compartment. Not much is left of the southwestern room, most of which had collapsed into the valley, but the room in the northwestern corner is fairly well preserved and contained some flat limestone slabs of unknown purpose, stone bowls and red- and black-painted pottery vessels.

The relatively well-preserved condition of these tower-like rooms revealed some interesting construction details: The walls were built of rough, unhewn stones, quarried from local limestone; branches—mainly of the tamarisk tree which grows abundantly in the Wadi Quraiya—were placed between the stone courses, some lengthwise and others crosswise, forming an intermediate course which acted as a binder for the wall. Incorporating tree branches in construction is well-known from various countries and was used over long periods. In 1 Kings 7:12, it is said that in the court of the Temple in Jerusalem there were "three courses of hewn stone … and a course of cedar beams." At Kuntillet 'Ajrud there were no hewn stones and no cedar beams, but the interlaced tamarisk branches seem to be a less refined version of the Temple construction technique. Wood of any kind is a rare find in such an ancient building.

With the exception of the benchroom, the entryway and the entrance court (which were covered with white plaster), the walls of this building were coated with a plaster of mud mixed with straw. Ceilings were made of branches, many of which were found in the debris of the rooms.

The most remarkable finds of the excavation, however, were the inscriptions and drawings. Most of these were found in the benchroom and in the two side rooms entered from the benchroom.

A fragment of a Phoenician inscription was found *in situ* on the north jamb of the doorway leading from the benchroom to the courtyard. Unfortunately, it is so faded that it cannot be read. Near the entrance to the western store room, fragments of another inscription on plaster were found. It, too, had originally been written on the jamb of the entrance to this store room. It resembles the other inscription in its poor state of preservation and fragmentary condition. It can, however, be read partially. The words which we have been able to decipher include:

wb'rh.'l.b … "and in the (just) ways of El"

brk.b'l.bym.ml … "blessed be Ba'al in the day of … "
šm.'l.bym.ml … "the name of El in the day of … "

The original location of these inscriptions—on the door jambs—recalls the Biblical verse: "And you shall write them on the doorposts of your home and one your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:9).

Another inscription was found on a plaster fragment which had dropped off the wall of the benchroom. It reads: … *brk.ymm.wyšb'w / hytb.yhwh* … The religious content is clear. *Brk.ymm* means "blessed be their day" and *hytb.yhwh* means "Yahweh favored." Although these texts are extremely incomplete and difficult to decipher, they are clearly religious in nature and appear to consist of requests, prayers and blessings.

The most dramatic discoveries were on two pithoi, previously mentioned, which were restored from sherds found in the benchroom. Both pithoi were densely covered with drawings as well as inscriptions. The drawings and inscriptions frequently overlapped. Most were executed in red ink and all are in early Hebrew script. Because of their very poor condition, we used a special photographic technique to bring out the script to help us decipher it.

The first large pithos contains two drawings, one on either side. One of the drawings includes three figures: a seated woman playing the lyre; the god Bes in the center with his genitals (or tail) exposed between his legs; and another unidentified deity on the left similarly exposed. Bes stands in his characteristic stance, arms akimbo with his customary feathered headdress. Originally an Egyptian demi-god, in the course of time Bes was adopted by most other countries in the ancient Near East and figures depicting him have been found frequently in Syria, Phoenicia and the Mediterranean islands.

The inscription written across the top of the drawing and over the unusual headdress of the god (goddess?) on the left reads as follows:

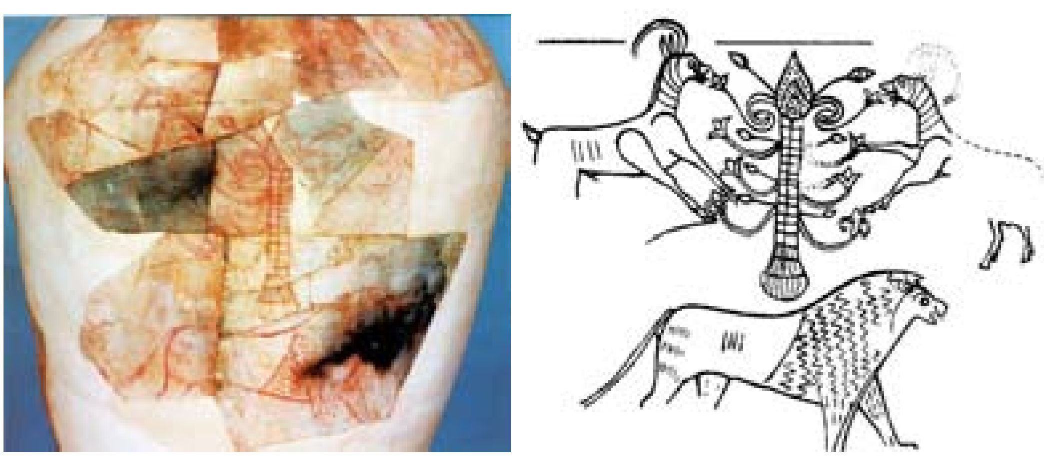
'mr.' … h. k. 'mr.lyhl … wlyw'sh.w … brkt.'tkm.
lyhwh.smrn.wl'srth.

The first portion of the inscription seems to be a statement in the form "X said to Y and Z" but only the word *'mr* "said" and the name *yw'sh* "Yo'asah" are legible.

The words following can be read in several ways. It is clearly a blessing which begins "May you be blessed by Yahweh." Then come the two final words *smrn* and *wl'srth*.[b] The former,

pronounced “shomrenu” in Hebrew, may have the meaning “protect us” or “guard us.” The same letters can also be read as “Shomron,” a proper name referring to the Biblical city of Shomron (Samaria), the capital of the Northern Kingdom. Which of the two interpretations is preferable? We cannot be sure. It would seem at first that the translation of *smrn* as “protect” is clearly preferable to “Shomron” because, in the Bible, *Yhwh* (Yahweh) is never followed by a proper name (with the exception of the title *tsebaot*, usually translated “God of Hosts”). However, there is an argument for the translation “Shomron” which we will present below.

The meaning of the last word *’srth* (pronounced “Asherato”) is even more enigmatic. Asherah is a pagan female deity mentioned frequently as the consort of Baal. But the “to” ending is a possessive form and this form is not used in Hebrew in connection with a proper name. However, if Asherah had the generic meaning of a female deity who was Yahweh’s consort, then the possessive form could have been used. Asherah or Asherat also has two other meanings: first, it can refer to an object, usually a tree, which symbolizes a deity; second, it can mean a *cella* or holy of holies (or shrine). With either of these two meanings the possessive ending “o” would be grammatically correct. Thus it would be proper to say “his (Yahweh’s) holy of holies” or “his (Yahweh’s) tree symbol or “his (Yahweh’s) consort.”



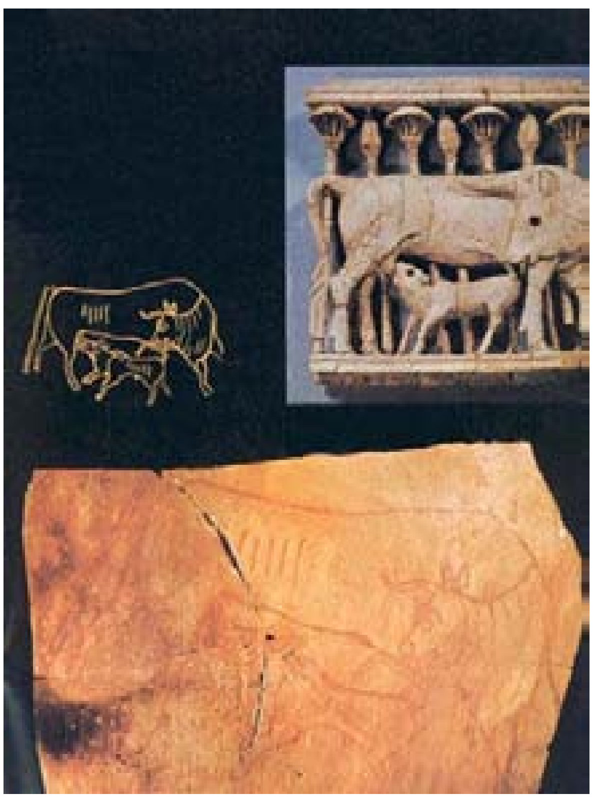
Dr. Z. Meshel and A. Hai

On the opposite side of the pithos that refers to “Yahweh and his Asherah,” a drawing shows a tree of life sprouting lilies and flanked by two ibexes. Below is a lion. (See artist’s rendering right.) This iconography is typically associated with the Canaanite goddess Asherah.

It is enticing to try to find a connection between the inscription and the drawings below it. One notices that the faces and ears of the two figures on the left resemble a cow or a calf. The calf may have had a holy meaning in the northern kingdom of Israel—suggested by the fact that Jeroboam erected a statue of a golden calf in the sanctuary at Bethel and at Dan (I Kings 12:29). Therefore, the depiction of deities with cow-like faces suggests that perhaps the inscription above

them may be read "Yahweh of Shomron." It is also possible that two of the three figures (the lady with the lyre, the Bes or the other standing person) may be depictions of "Yahweh and his consort" if the final phrase is read in this way—a thoroughly blasphemous notion, but one which seems consistent with the diverse religious influences at Kuntillet 'Ajrud.

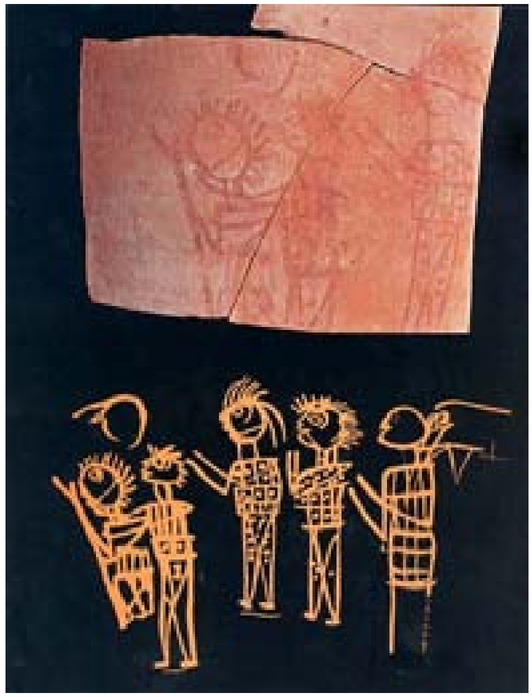
On the other side of this same large pithos is a drawing of a "tree-of-life," sprouting lily flowers, and flanked on either side by ibexes. Below the tree of life is a majestic lion in motion. This pithos also contains a drawing of a cow, head turned back, suckling its calf. These motifs are well known in the Syro-Phoenician world, and we found many close comparisons to the 'Ajrud drawings. It is easy to see that the artistic execution at 'Ajrud is not refined; we may be quite sure that the drawings were by local artists who, although isolated in the desert, were influenced by the Syro-Phoenician cultural environment.



Cow and Suckling Calf. Found at Kuntillet 'Ajrud, this motif was widely known in the Syro-Phoenician world of the ninth century B.C.E. The strikingly similar, though much more refined, ivory carving (shown above the ostracon) was discovered at Nimrud in northern Syria in the palace of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (859–824 B.C.E).

Avraham Hai, Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University

The second pithos contains a number of drawings, most of them poorly executed. These include the figure of a man drawing a bow, a cow (this time without a calf) and a striking scene of five figures standing in a row with arms upraised in a gesture of prayer.



Avraham Hai, Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University

Three people, arms upraised in a gesture of prayer, were drawn on the outside of one of two large, almost complete, pithoi or storage jars found at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud. Both pithoi contain inscriptions as well as drawings. The three praying figures are part of a group of five people, too faded to illustrate in their entirety. The drawing technique is crude and personal, probably that of an unskilled, local artist. The numerous inscriptions on this pithos include blessings and an incomplete Hebrew alphabet with the letter *peh* preceding *ayin*, an alphabetic order known from the Bible in Lamentations and Proverbs.

This pithos also contains a number of inscriptions and four Hebrew abecedaries.[c] In these abecedaries the letter *peh* precedes the *ayin*, rather than the reverse, as is usually the case in the later Hebrew alphabet. This reversal of letters is also found in four acrostic paragraphs in the Bible (Lamentations 1–3; Proverbs 31). A Hebrew alphabet from the 11th century B.C.E. was discovered at Izbet Sartah in which the same letter reversal occurred. Apparently, the alphabetic order preserved in the eighth-century Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscription is not an error, but a continuation of a much earlier alphabetic tradition.

Another inscription on this pithos contains a blessing:

’mryw ’mrl.‘dny h … brktk.lyhwh …
wl’srth.ybrk.wysmrk wyhy ‘m.’dnu …

“Amaryau said to my lord … may you be blessed by Yahweh and by his Asherah. Yahweh bless you and keep you and be with you … ”

A similar inscription was incised on the rim of an enormous stone bowl found in the benchroom. The bowl was apparently dedicated to the site for use there by its donor. What the use was we do not know. Given the fact that the bowl weighs over 400 pounds, it is safe to say that the donor, one "Obadyau," was not only wealthy but also believed in the sanctity of the site.



Avraham Hai, Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University

This stone bowl weighing more than 400 pounds was an offering found in the benchroom at Kuntillet 'Ajrud. The inscription on the rim reads "(Belonging) to 'Obadyau son of 'Adnah, may he be blessed by Yahwe(h)."

The inscription on the rim of the bowl reads as follows:

l'bdyw bn 'dnh brk h'lyhw

"(Belonging) to 'Obadyau son of 'Adnah, may he
be blessed by Yahwe(h) …

The donor's name "Obadyau," like most of the other private names, has the ending "yau" (common in the northern kingdom and known from the Samaria ostraca[d] and other finds) and not "yahu" (the common form in Judah). Does this show that the people who wrote the inscriptions came from the northern kingdom of Israel? This is another problem yet to be solved. A second stone bowl found in the bench-room also contains a "yau" name. It reads:

sm'yw bn 'zr

"Shema'yau son of 'Ezer"

Adnah (the father of Obadyau who gave the large stone bowl to the site) bears a name that appears in 2 Chronicles 17:14. This Biblical Adnah commanded 300,000 men under King Jehosaphat, who reigned in Judah between 867 and 851 B.C.E. If the donor of the bowl was the

son of the Biblical Adnah, this would date the bowl and the site a generation after Jehosaphat—that is—to the late ninth century B.C.E. This fits well into our dating of the site to a period between the mid-ninth century and the mid-eighth century B.C.E.

Another group of secular inscriptions are those which were incised on vessels before and after firing. Those incised after firing include three personal names. They also include the inscription *lsr'r* which was found scratched four times on storage jars. *lsr'r* is similar to two inscriptions on recently found bullae (sealings) which were stamped *lsrh'r* (lesar ha'ir) "(belonging) to the governor of the city." These sealings have been attributed by Professor Nahman Avigad to the governor of Jerusalem. According to this hypothesis, the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscription should be read *lesar 'ir* (without the definite article *ha*)—"(belonging) to the governor of a city." The term would then refer to the person who was in charge of the site. The presence of a governor who received supplies shows that 'Ajrud was organized as a small administrative unit.

Finally, we should mention short inscriptions which were incised on storage jars before firing. Most of the large storage jars had one or two letters incised on the shoulder. The most common single letter was *'alef*. Less common was the letter *yod*. The combination *qof resh* occurred twice. The purpose of these signs is not clear. Perhaps they were marks of capacity, quantity or quality, destination or use. In any case, the markings were decided on at the place of manufacture of the vessels, and before they were finished; this place could not have been Kuntillet 'Ajrud.

These letters may indicate that the content complied with religious law or was intended for religious use. At Masada, some storage jars were found marked with the letter *taw* as well as many small sherds with the letter *yod* and other initials. Yigael Yadin notes that in the Mishnah (a second century C.E. compilation of what was previously oral law) the use of letters on vessels is explained: "If a vessel was found on which is written a *qof*, it is *qorban* (offering); if a *mem*, it is *ma'aser* (tithed); if a *dalet*, it is *demai* (tithing is uncertain); if a *tet*, it is *tebel* (untithed); if a *taw*, it is *terumah* (heave-offering)." The vessels from Masada date about 800 years later than the storage jars at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and the Mishnah is still later, but perhaps the tradition recorded in the Mishnah and preserved at Masada is based on a custom already prevalent in the days of the monarchy. If so, then do the letters *qof resh* at Kuntillet 'Ajrud stand for *qorban* (sacrifice) and does the letter *yod* signify *ma'aser* (tithed)? Do the letters indicate that the site was inhabited by a group of priests who, as in Jerusalem and other centers, received and lived on tithes and offerings?

Additional support for the hypothesis of a group of priests living at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud is the large quantity of finely woven linen fabric found there. Linen fabrics must have had some special meaning for the inhabitants. According to the Bible, linen had cultic significance. Ezekiel stresses that when the priests enter the gates of the inner court, “they must wear linen garments; they must have nothing of wool on them while they minister at the gates of the inner court and within. They shall have linen turbans upon their heads and linen breeches upon their loins … ” (Ezekiel 44:17–18).

Over 100 pieces of textile fragments were found in our excavations, preserved by the dry desert air. Most of the fabric was linen, but there was some wool, too. All the fabric was made from good quality yarn and was evenly woven, although the thickness and density of the weave varied. Pieces of cloth were woven together so neatly and carefully and with such a fine needle that it resembles today’s so-called “invisible mending.” Some of the fabrics have colored yarn woven into them as decorations.

We found some fabric made of mixed wool and linen. In one instance the red threads are wool and the blue linen. Garments made of a mixture of linen and wool are expressly forbidden in the Bible (Leviticus 19:19; Deuteronomy 22:11), but it may be that the prohibition was for ordinary people and not priests. The description of the garments of Aaron shows that they were especially splendid. The rich colors could probably be obtained only by dying woolen threads, thus indicating that part of the garments were of wool as they were at ‘Ajrud.

It would be tempting to call the building at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud a temple, but it bears none of the architectural features we customarily associate with a temple. The plan of the building does not contain a holy of holies, nor does it conform to the plan of other temples known from excavations in the Near East. Moreover, we found the remains of no cult objects, such as animal altars or incense burners or cult altars.

On the other hand, although the building was probably not a temple, we think that it was a religious center of some kind where people deposited their offerings in the benchroom.

The site represents, in our opinion, a religious center which had some connection with the journeys of the Judean kings to Eilat, Ezion-Geber and perhaps even to southern Sinai. The establishment of this center may have come about through identification of the site with one of the Israelite traditions concerning Sinai. Travelers could pray here, each man to his god, and ask the divine blessing for his journey, much as is done today at holy places, or at sheikhs’ tombs.

After the Exodus, the only Biblical personality who went to Mt. Horeb (identified with Mt. Sinai) was Elijah (1 Kings 19:8), who lived during the reign of King Jehosaphat (861–851 B.C.E.). Following Elijah, did a tradition of pilgrimage to Mt. Horeb (Sinai) develop, and was Kuntillet ‘Ajrud a station on the pilgrims’ route?

The pagan elements, so tangibly represented at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, are also vividly portrayed in Biblical descriptions of the period. Elijah himself vented his fury at King Ahab (871–852 B.C.E.) of Israel who took for himself a Phoenician queen, Jezebel (1 Kings 17–18). Jezebel propagated Baal worship in Israel and her husband built her a temple of Baal (1 Kings 16:31–32). Jezebel’s daughter, Athaliah, became queen of Judah after the death of her son Ahaziah, who ruled only one year. Athaliah built a temple of Baal in Jerusalem and murdered all living descendants of the Davidic line (except for Joash—her grandson—who was hidden from her for seven years).

It is tantalizing to try to date Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, to pinpoint in whose reign this religious center was established. The pottery and the form of the script suggest the end of the ninth to the beginning of the eighth centuries. But to be more precise, we must look for a time when the “facts” which we have discovered at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud could have occurred together: the use of Phoenician script, the mixture of religious practices, priests in residence, names with yau endings (a northern rather than a Judean influence), tools made of wood from trees in southern Sinai, and the location of the site on a route linking Judah with Eilat.

Perhaps Kuntillet ‘Ajrud was established during the short reign of the half-Phoenician queen, Athaliah, whose Phoenician lineage, whose hatred of the priests of the house of David, and whose worship of Baal is all documented in the Book of Kings. Perhaps she sent her priests to live and serve at ‘Ajrud. Perhaps it was she who gave the Phoenicians from the north their much sought passage through Judah on their way to the Red Sea. Perhaps this traffic explains why we find wood from the south and yau names from the north. Perhaps in the Phoenician inscriptions they left behind, these Phoenician travelers left evidence of their respite at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud.

St. Peter's House

Has the House Where Jesus Stayed in Capernaum Been Found?

By James F. Strange and Hershel Shanks



Garo Nalbandian

Beneath the foundations of this octagonal Byzantine martyrium church at Capernaum, archaeologists discovered a simple first-century C.E. home that may have been inhabited by Jesus during his Galilean ministry.



Garo Nalbandian, courtesy Fr. Virgilio Corbo

The Capernaum synagogue, residential area and octagonal church, clustered on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.

The synagogue was built on a platform, mounted by steps at its southeast and southwest corners. The steps lead to a courtyard, or room, with an intact flagstone floor. This auxiliary room probably served as the synagogue's school room. The interior of the main prayer room was divided by two parallel rows of columns forming a nave and two aisles. Recent excavations uncovered more ancient buildings beneath this synagogue. Since we know that, historically, the site of a town's synagogue rarely changes, one of these earlier buildings was very likely the Capernaum synagogue in which Jesus preached.

South of the synagogue is a residential area, the remains of private homes. Beyond that (84 feet south of the synagogue) is the octagonal church built over St. Peter's house.

Italian archaeologists claim to have discovered the house were Jesus stayed in Capernaum. Proof positive is still lacking and may never be found, but all signs point to the likelihood that the house of St. Peter where Jesus stayed, near Capernaum's famous synagogue, is an authentic relic.

Nestled on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, the ruins of Capernaum slumbered peacefully for hundreds of years; indeed, some of its remains went undisturbed for thousands of years. Modern investigation of this site began in the mid-19th century, but even now the earth is still yielding new secrets. What the future holds, no one knows.

An American explorer and orientalist, Edward Robinson, first surveyed the site in 1838. Robinson correctly identified some exposed architectural remains as an ancient synagogue, but he did not connect the site with ancient Capernaum.

In 1866, Captain Charles Wilson conducted limited excavations on behalf of the London-based Palestine Exploration Fund. Wilson correctly identified the site as Capernaum and concluded that the synagogue was the one referred to in Luke 7:5, which was built by a Roman centurion who had admired the Jews of Kfar Nahum (Capernaum[1]).

As a result of the British interest in the site, local Bedouin began their own search for treasure. They smashed and overturned ancient architectural members looking for small finds to sell on the local antiquities markets. The Bedouin were soon followed by local Arab contractors who appropriated overturned and broken stones for use in new construction projects.

At last in 1894, the Franciscan Fathers acquired the site in order to protect its precious remains. To ensure that the exposed remains would not be carried away, the Franciscans reburied some of them and built a high stone wall around the property.

Naturally, special Christian interest in the site stemmed from Capernaum's importance in Jesus' life and ministry. According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus left Nazareth and "settled" in Capernaum (to render the verb literally) (Matthew 4:13). In and around Capernaum Jesus recruited several of his disciples including Peter, who was to become his spiritual fisherman (Mark 1:16–20). Jesus performed a number of miracles in Capernaum—for example, curing the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:1–5). Jesus frequently preached and taught at the Capernaum synagogue (Mark 1:21). In the Capernaum synagogue, Jesus first uttered those mystical words:

> "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood possesses eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day … As the living Father sent me … he who eats shall live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven." (John 6:54–58)

The word of Jesus went forth first from Capernaum. Capernaum was not only the center of Jesus' Galilean ministry, but it was also the place of his longest residence.

Where did Jesus live in Capernaum? While we are not told specifically, the fair inference seems to be that he lived at Peter's house. We are told that Jesus "entered Peter's house, [and]

saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever … ” (Matthew 8:14). That evening he was still at Peter’s house (Matthew 8:16). Apparently Jesus lived there. In Mark we read that “when he [Jesus] returned to Capernaum after a few days, someone reported that he was at home” (Mark 2:1). The home referred to, it seems, is Peter’s house. This same passage from Mark speaks of four men digging through the roof of the house to lower a paralytic on a pallet so that Jesus could heal him:

> And when he returned to Capernaum after a few days, someone reported that he was at home. And many were gathered, so many that they did not have any room, even about the door. And he was speaking the word to them. And they came bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four men. And since they could not get to him because of the crowd, they took apart the roof where he was. And when they had dug out a hole, they lowered the pallet on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said, “My son, your sins are forgiven.” (Mark 2:1–5).

Until 1968, the primary focus of excavations at Capernaum was the synagogue. This is understandable. It is indeed a magnificent building of shimmering white limestone that stands out in stark contrast to the rough black basalt of the surrounding houses. The synagogue was constructed on a platform to conform with the rabbinic injunction to build the synagogue on the highest point in the town.[2] The synagogue is entered by a flight of steps on either side of the platform. The entrance facade contains three doors facing Jerusalem.

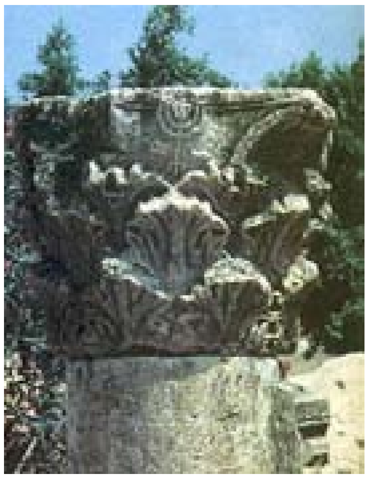


The interior of the Capernaum synagogue. Although this impressive row of white limestone columns looks like a facade, it is actually the narrow north end of the synagogue nave. The columns rest on pedestals, each carved from one stone.

Garo Nalbandian

Inside the synagogue, two rows of stone benches, probably for elders who governed the synagogue, line the two long walls. The other congregants sat on mats on the floor.

Two rows of columns divide the main prayer room into a central nave and two side aisles. Parallel to the back wall, a third row of columns creates a third aisle in the rear of the main room. Adjoining the main room was a side room that was no doubt used for a variety of community functions—as a school, a court, a hostel for visitors, a dining hall, a meeting place. In antiquity, the synagogue served all these functions.



Garo Nalbandian

A Corinthian column capital from the Capernaum synagogue. A seven-branched menorah decorates this elaborately carved capital. To the right of the menorah's base is a ram's horn (*shofar*) and, to the left, an incense shovel; both are ritual objects once used in the Temple in Jerusalem.

When this synagogue was first excavated by the Franciscan Friar Gaudentius Orfali in the 1920s, Friar Orfali identified it as the synagogue in which Jesus had preached and performed miracles. Today, however, all competent scholars reject this dating of the Capernaum synagogue. In 1968, the Franciscans renewed their excavations in the synagogue under the direction of two Franciscan fathers, Virgilio Corbo and Stanislao Loffreda. This pair of Italian scholars concluded that the synagogue dated to the fourth or fifth century C.E. Their dating was based primarily on a hoard of 10,000 coins they found under the synagogue floor. This new conclusion set off a lively debate, still unresolved, among scholars who had previously contended that the building should be dated to the late second or third century C.E.

Whatever the date of the surviving Capernaum synagogue, it is likely that the Capernaum synagogue in which Jesus preached stood on this same spot—although this cannot be proved. As we know from other communities, synagogue sites rarely change within a town. A new synagogue is simply reconstructed on the site of the old one. Recently, traces of earlier buildings have been found below the extant Capernaum synagogue. Judging from the size of these earlier

buildings and the paving on their floors, they were probably private homes. One of these earlier remains may well be of a home converted into a synagogue in which Jesus preached.

The excavations undertaken by the Franciscans beginning in 1968 went far beyond the synagogue, however. The Franciscans also worked to uncover the town of which the synagogue was a part. It was in this connection that they discovered what was probably St. Peter's house where Jesus stayed when he lived in Capernaum.



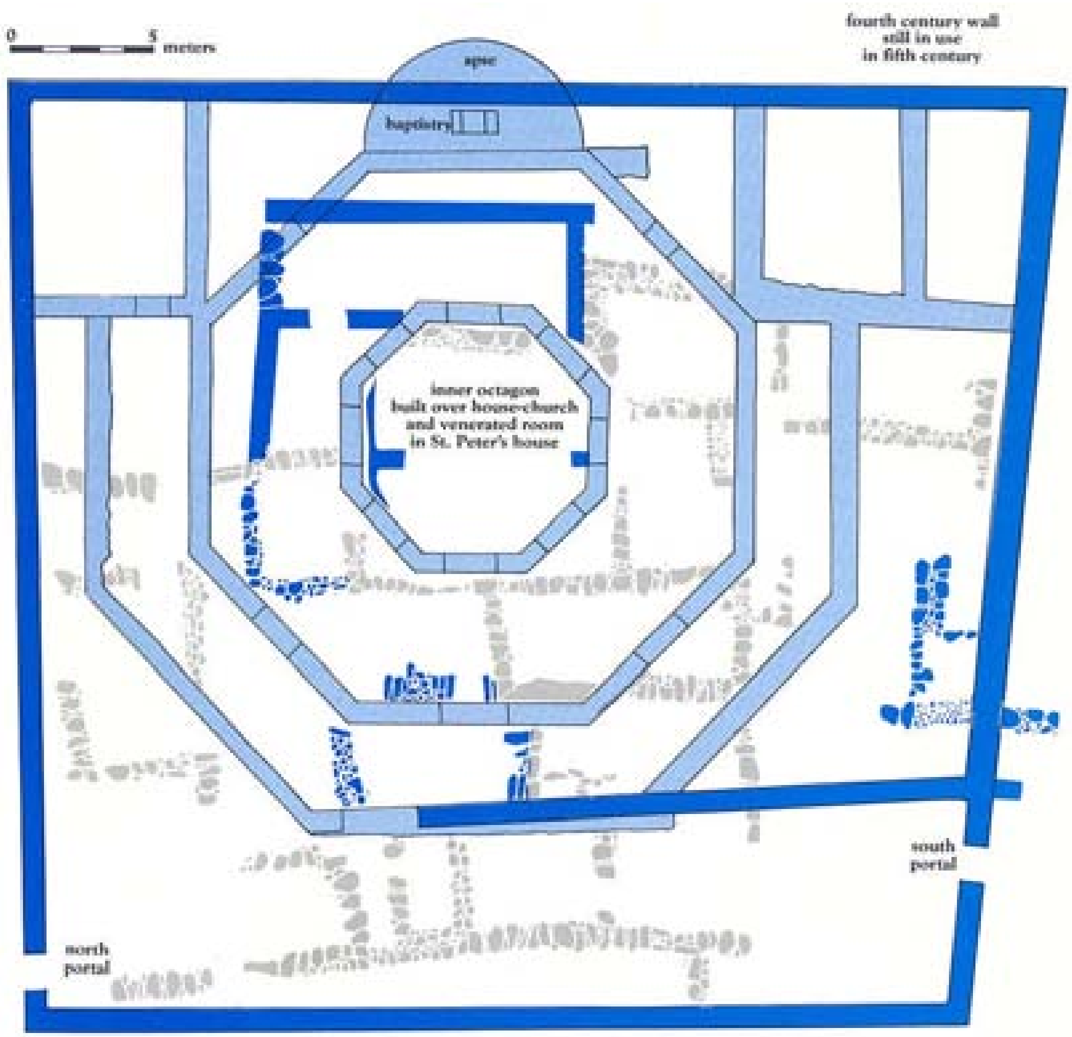
Garo Nalbandian

Black basalt walls remain from houses at Capernaum in which Peter's contemporaries may have lived. The rough black basalt contrasts strikingly with the synagogue's finished white limestone (visible in the background). The construction of the basalt houses is identical to that of the house of St. Peter found beneath the octagonal church.

Indeed, it was while investigating the context of the synagogue that they became especially interested in the remains of an unusual octagonal-shaped building 84 feet south of the synagogue, opposite the synagogue facade facing Jerusalem. This octagonal building had long been known and, along with the synagogue, it was frequently mentioned in medieval travelers' accounts.

Friar Orfali had done some work on the octagonal building in the 1920s. His plan showed the building as consisting of three concentric octagons. He found only four sides of the largest octagon, which was about 75 feet across; he assumed the other sides had been replaced by later construction. The second octagon was about 57 feet across; and the smallest 26 feet. The smallest octagon had rested on eight square pillars crowned by arches to hold the roof. The building had been paved with mosaics, traces of which remained. Inside the smallest octagon

was an octagonal mosaic band of lotus flowers in the form of a chalice; in the center of this mosaic was a beautiful peacock, an early Christian symbol of immortality. Unfortunately, the head and feet of the peacock had been destroyed.



Plan adapted from Cafarnao I: Gli Edifici Della Citta *(Franciscan Printing Press: 1975)*

The octagonal church (fifth century C.E.), superimposed on fourth- and first-century remains.

Opinion regarding the octagonal building varied. Local guides invariably pointed it out to gullible tourists as the house of St. Peter, although its identification even as a private residence was not accepted by most scholars. Some suggested the concentric octagons were the public fountains of ancient Capernaum. The best scholarly view, however, was that it was an ancient church. Friar Orfali identified the building as a Byzantine baptistery, citing similar octagonal structures in Europe, such as San Giovanni in Fonte of Ravenna.

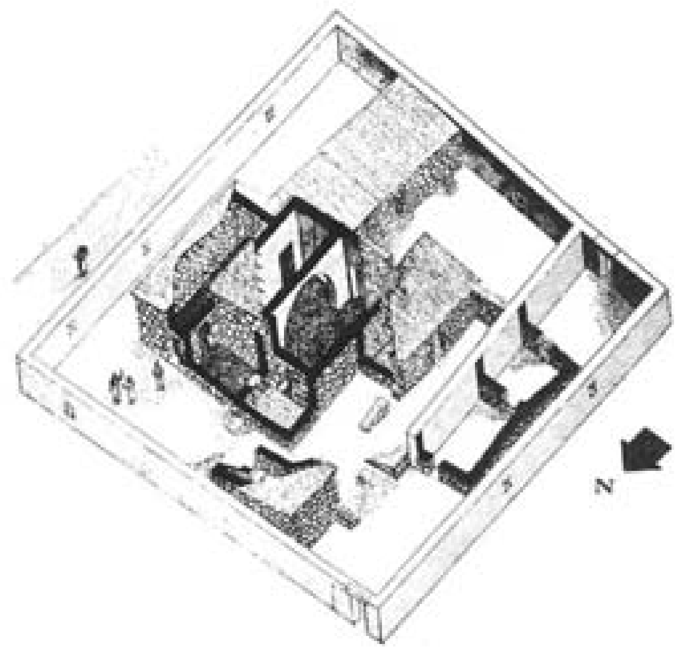
When Corbo and Loffreda renewed excavations in 1968, they discovered an apse together with a baptistery on the east side of the middle octagon—which was why the third or outer octagon did not close. The building was oriented by the apse to the east, the orientation of most ancient churches. The discovery of the eastward-oriented apse and the baptistery removed any doubt that the structure was in fact an ancient church. The Franciscans dated it to the middle of the fifth century C.E. In its first phase, the church consisted of but two concentric octagons. The outer partial octagon was added later to form a portico on five of the eight sides—on the north, west and south. The other three sides were occupied with the apse and two sacristies[3] on either side of the apse. The precise date of these additions has not been determined.

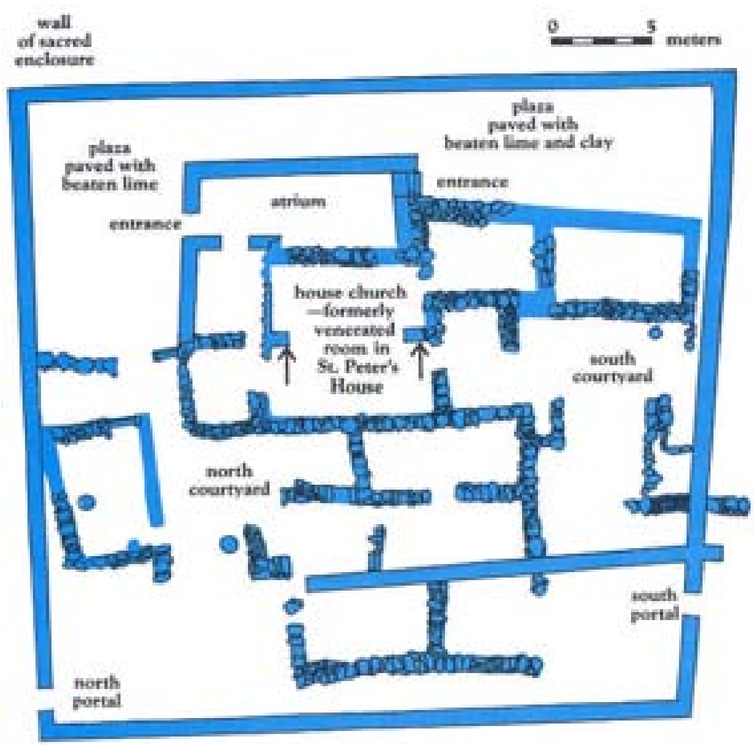
But why was the church built in the shape of an octagon? The answer is that octagonal churches were built to commemorate special events in Christian history which supposedly occurred at the site. For example, the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem was built in an octagonal form by the Emperor Constantine in the fourth century C.E., supposedly directly over the cave where Jesus was born. The octagon in the Bethlehem church was intended to mark this spot. Presumably the octagonal church at Capernaum was intended to mark some other site of special importance in Christian history.

It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that this octagonal church at Capernaum was a memorial church. Some scholars believed that the octagonal church was built to memorialize Jesus' temporary residence in Capernaum and may well have been connected with ancient memories or traditions regarding the location of St. Peter's house, also called "the house of Simon and Andrew" in Mark 1:29.

When the Franciscan archaeologists, in their renewed excavations, dug beneath the mosaic floor of the church they found some hard evidence to support this speculation.

Directly beneath the octagonal church they found the remains of another building which was almost certainly a church, judging from the graffiti on the walls left by Christian pilgrims. For example, a graffito scratched on one wall reads, "Lord Jesus Christ help thy servant … " A proper name followed in the original but is no longer readable. Another graffito reads, "Christ have mercy." Elsewhere on the walls crosses are depicted. The graffiti are predominantly in Greek, but some are also in Syriac and Hebrew. The presence of Hebrew graffiti suggests that the community may have been composed of Jewish-Christians at this time.





Museum of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum/Plan adapted from Cafarnao I: Gli Edifici Della Citta *(Franciscan Printing Press: 1975)*

House church from the fourth century. In this artist's reconstruction (top), based on the plan shown at bottom, we can see that the main room of St. Peter's first-century house has been renovated. Entrances have been added and an arch built over the center of the room supports a two-story-high masonry roof. The original black basalt walls remain but they have been plastered and the room is now the central hall of a church. On the east side of this now venerated room is an atrium, or entryway, 10 feet wide and 27 feet long. Surrounding the house church compound is a wall about 88 feet square.

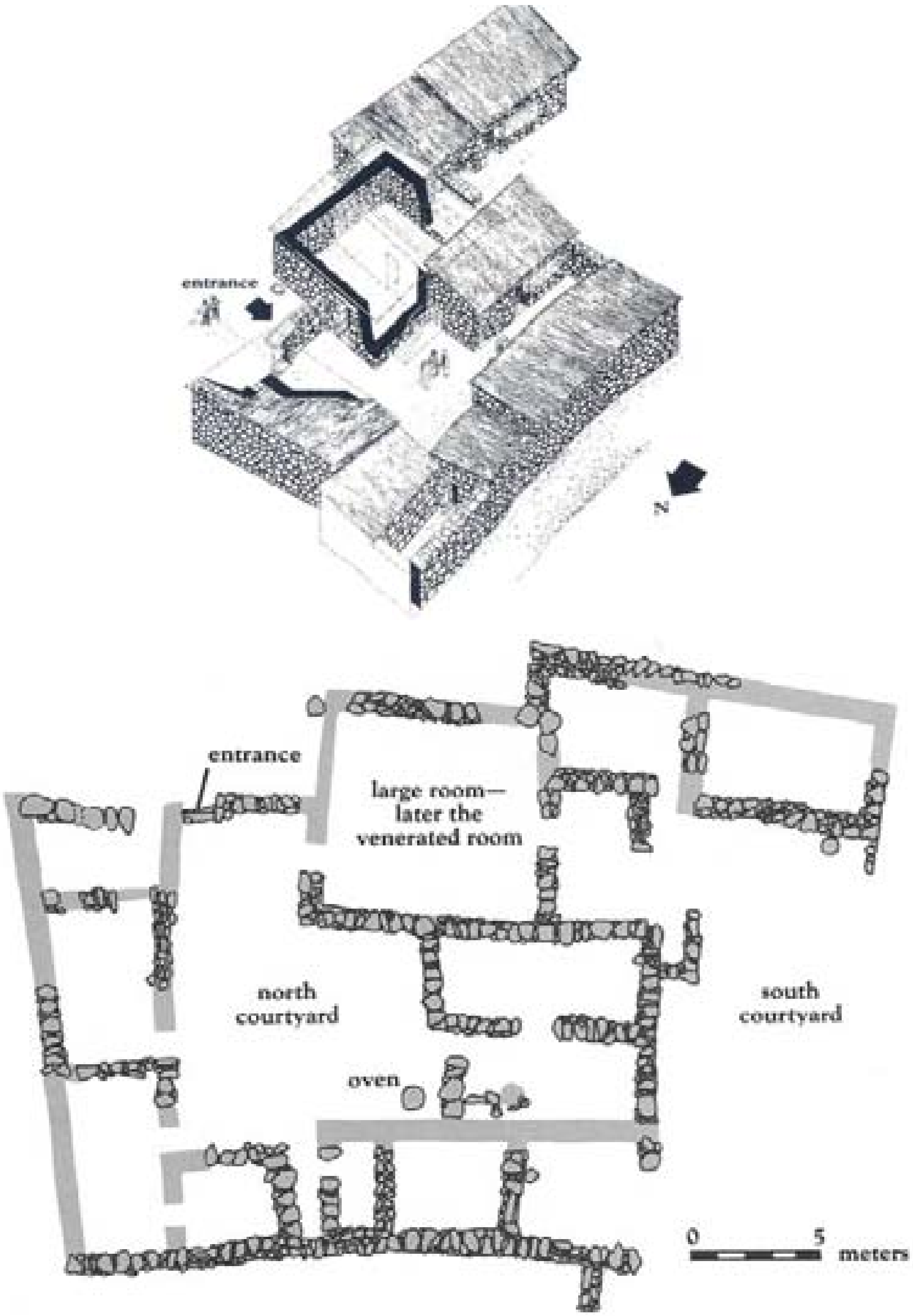
The central hall of this lower church is 27 feet long and 25 feet wide. The roof was supported by a large two-story-high arch over the center of the room. Two masonry piers made of worked basalt blocks, found against the north and south walls of the room, supported the arch. In addition to the bases of the piers, the excavators found two voussoirs, or wedge-shaped stones, from the arch that once supported the roof. The voussoirs were still covered with plaster and paint.

Two doors on the south and one on the north allowed easy access to the central hall. Smaller rooms (9 feet by 12 feet) adjoined the hall on the north. A long narrow room (10 feet by 27 feet) on the east is called the atrium by the excavators. Outside the atrium, which probably served as an entryway into the central hall, is a thoroughfare paved with hard-packed beaten earth and lime, providing a good solid surface for heavy foot traffic.

The central hall was plastered all over and then painted in reds, yellows, greens, blues, browns, white and black, with pomegranates, flowers, figs and geometric designs. Other objects almost surely appeared, but the fragmentary nature of the plaster makes interpretation difficult. The entire church complex was surrounded by a wall about 88 feet long on each of its four sides.

This church complex we have just described was its final phase only, just before the octagonal church was built directly above it. This was how it existed in the late fourth century. However, the origins of this fourth century church are of a far earlier time.

According to the excavators, the central hall of this church was originally built as part of a house about the beginning of the early Roman period, around 63 B.C.E. Not all the house has been excavated, but almost 100 feet north to south and almost 75 feet east and west have been uncovered. This house was originally built of large, rounded wadi stones of the rough black basalt that abounds in the area. Only the stones of the thresholds and jambs of the doors had been worked or dressed. Smaller stones were pounded between the larger ones to make the wall more secure, but no mortar was used in the original house. Walls so constructed could not have held a second story, nor could the original roof have been masonry; no doubt it was made from beams and branches of trees covered with a mixture of earth and straw. (This is consistent with the tale of the paralytic let down through a hole in the roof.) The archway was probably built inside the central room of the house in order to support a high roof when the house was later converted to a church.



Museum of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum/Plan adapted from Cafarnao I: Gli Edifici Della Citta *(Franciscan Printing Press: 1975)*

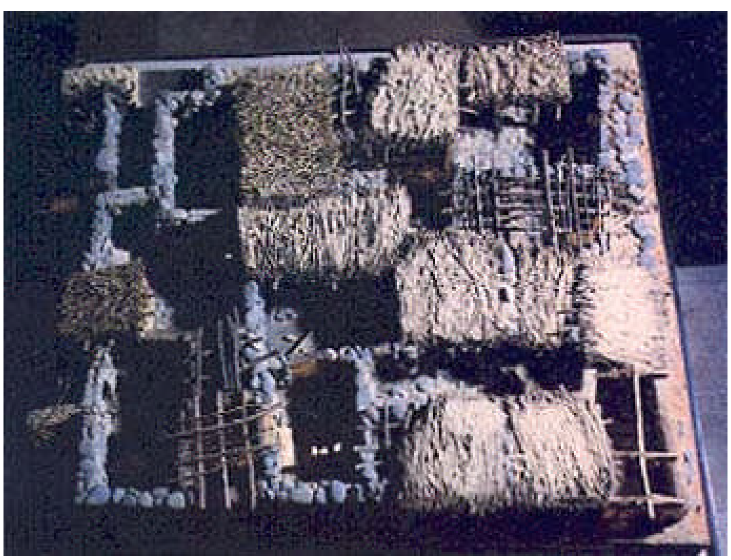
An artist's reconstruction (based on plan at bottom) of the first-century house that may have belonged to St. Peter. Like most houses of the early Roman period, it was a cluster of rooms structured around two courtyards. The center courtyard served as the family kitchen. Animals may have been kept in the other courtyard. The largest room of the house, delineated in black, later became the central hall of a house church.

The original pavement of the room also consisted of unworked black basalt stones with large spaces between. Here the excavators found pottery sherds and coins that helped date the original construction. (Such a floor of ill-fitting stones enables us easily to understand the parable of the lost drachma in Luke 15:8.)

The original house was organized around two interior courtyards, as was customary in the Roman period. The outside entrance on the east side opens directly into the north courtyard.

This courtyard was probably the main work area for the family that lived here. A round oven, where the family's food was no doubt prepared, was found in the southwest corner of this courtyard. This courtyard was surrounded by small rooms on the north and west. On the south was the largest room of the house. It was this room that later had the arch built into it so that its roof could be raised after the room became the central hall of the house church. As originally built, the room had two entrances, one on the south and a second on the north. The room originally measured about 21 feet by 20 feet, a large room by ancient standards.

The southern door of this room led into the house's second courtyard. This courtyard may have been used for animals or for work areas associated with whatever house industry was engaged in by the owners. Curiously enough, several fishhooks were found beneath one of the upper pavements from the later house church, although this does not prove that the inhabitants of the original house were fishermen.



Garo Nalbandian, courtesy Museum of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum

Reconstruction of a first-century Capernaum house. This bird's-eye view shows a model of a house whose size, number of rooms and building materials are all typical of houses built in Capernaum about 60 B.C.E. The simple stone walls of the one-story residence could not support a masonry roof. Instead, a crisscross of tree branches was used, augmented for some rooms with a mixture of earth and straw.

For all intents and purposes, this house as originally built is indistinguishable from all other houses of ancient Capernaum. Its indoor living area is somewhat larger than usual, but overall it is about the same size as other houses. Its building materials are the usual ones. It was built with no more sophistication than the others in the region. In short, there is nothing to distinguish this house from its neighbors, except perhaps the events that transpired there and what happened to it later.

During the second half of the first century C.E., someone did mark this house off from its neighbors. Perhaps as early as the middle of the first century C.E. the floor, walls and ceiling of the single large room of the house were plastered. This was unusual in ancient Capernaum. Thus far, this is the only excavated house in the city with plastered walls. In the centuries that followed, the walls were re-plastered at least twice. The floor, too, was replastered a number of times.

The pottery used in the room also changed when the walls were plastered. The pottery that dates to the period before the walls were plastered is much like the pottery found in other houses designed for domestic use—a large number of cooking pots, bowls, pitchers, juglets and a few storage jars. Once the room was plastered, however, we find only storage jars and the remains of some oil lamps.

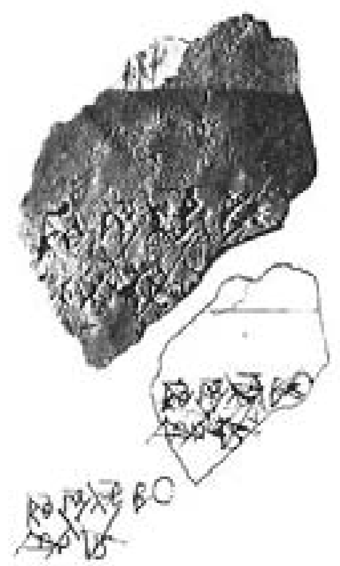
The activities associated with the building obviously changed. No longer was the preparing and serving of food a major activity. Judging from the absence of bowls, people were no longer eating on the premises. The only activity that persisted was the storage of something in the large, two-handled storage jars of the period. Unfortunately, we cannot be sure what was stored. Within the thin layers of lime with which the floor was plastered and re-plastered, the excavators found many pieces of broken lamps.

At this time in early Roman history the only rooms that were plastered in such poor houses were important ones in which groups of people regularly gathered. Plaster provides a reflective surface and aids illumination. Both the plastering and the absence of pottery characteristic of family use combine to suggest that the room, previously part of a private home, was now devoted to some kind of public use. In view of the graffiti that mention Jesus as "Lord" and "Christ" (in Greek), it is reasonable to conclude, though cautiously, that this may be the earliest evidence for Christian gatherings that has ever come to light.

We have already referred to the fact that during the approximately 300 years that the building served as a so-called "house church," over a hundred graffiti were scratched on the plastered walls. These include, by our count, 111 Greek inscriptions, nine Aramaic, six or perhaps

as many as nine Syriac in the Estrangelo alphabet,[4] two Latin and at least one Hebrew inscription. Various forms of crosses, a boat, and perhaps a monogram, composed of the letters from the name Jesus, also appeared.

According to the Franciscan excavators, the name of St. Peter appears at least twice in these inscriptions. Many scholars are highly skeptical of these readings—and with good reason. Unfortunately, the scholarly publication of these very difficult inscriptions does not allow completely independent verification of the excavators' conclusions because of the poor quality of the photographs. But even accepting the Franciscan expedition's drawings of what they see on these plaster fragments, there are still problems.[5]



Courtesy Photographic Archive, Archaeological Expedition at Capernaum/Emmanuele Testa

A "St. Peter" graffito? The name "Peter" may appear in this "mare's nest" of lines (top) scratched on a wall of the Capernaum house church. The drawing (center) is an exact reproduction of the inscription. To the Franciscan excavators, the lines form the words "Peter, the helper of Rome," but many scholars dispute this reading. At bottom is another drawing, this one an interpretation of the drawing of the "mare's nest" of lines. The excavators read: RO M AE BO … PETR US. ROMAE is Latin for Rome; PETRUS, Latin for Peter; and BO(HΘDC), Greek for helper.

Some scholars see two large X's scratched over the inscription in an apparent effort to deface it. The strokes the excavators claim for "T" and "U" in the so-called "Peter" are, in fact, part of the two XX's incised over the inscription. Also, the graffito shows horizontal marks above the groups of letters in the first line, indicating that these letter groups are Greek abbreviations. Thus, the meaning of the entire inscription is still a mystery.

Let us look more closely at these inscriptions allegedly referring to St. Peter. One, according to the excavators, is a Latin and Greek inscription that refers to "Peter, the helper of Rome." This of course would be astounding, if this is what it actually said. If we look at the

photograph of the inscription, it is difficult to see anything more than a “mare’s nest” of jumbled lines.

However, the epigrapher of the expedition, Emmanuele Testa, provides us with a drawing of the scratchings on the plaster fragment, which appears to be a faithful reproduction of what we called the “mare’s nest.”

From this, the epigrapher extracted in another line drawing what the excavators see—letters in an inscription.

The excavators see XV scratched over the underlying inscription. We see instead two large XX’s apparently scratched over the inscription in an effort to deface it, but this is a small point. The excavators read the underlying inscription:

RO M AE BO …
PETR US

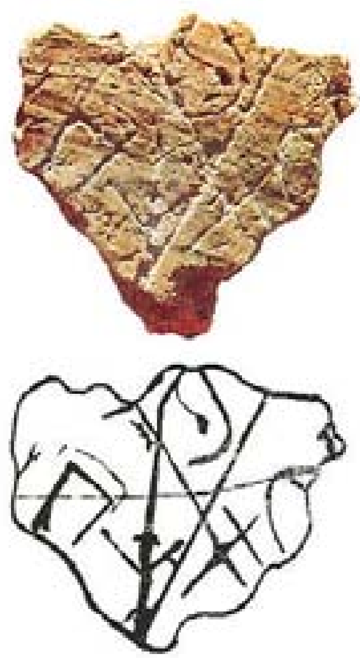
The first four letters of the name Peter (PETR), we are told, are in the form of a monogram—a cluster of letters. “Rome” is in Latin, as is “Petrus.” BO is taken as a Greek word BO[HDC] or some other Greek word from that root, meaning helper.

To the senior author of this article, the strokes which compose two of the letters of the name Peter, T (cocked to the right) and U (appearing as V in the drawing) are rather clearly part of the two XX’s incised over the underlying inscription. So we are really left with pure ambiguity.

The word ROMAE is possible, but the MA does not look like anything at all to our eyes. Other readings are possible, especially because horizontal lines appear above the three groups of letters in the first line, which suggests that each of the three groups is a Greek abbreviation. The excavators see a second reference to St. Peter in another graffito on a plaster fragment, this time in Latin but in Greek letters.

Π E T P V C

The excavators’ photograph and drawing of the fragment are printed together below.



Courtesy Photographic Archive, Archaeological Expedition at Capernaum/Emmanuele Testa

Greek letters for "Peter." This inscription is one of a hundred scratched on the walls of the Capernaum building that served as a church from about the mid-first century through the fourth century C.E. A drawing (bottom) shows the various marks on the plaster. The first letter on the left is clearly *pi*. The excavators also see the following letters: *epsilon* (E), *tau* (T), *rho* (R), *upsilon* (V) and *lunate sigma* (C). However, another interpretation is that the key strokes of these letters are really part of two XX's incised over the inscription, similar to the XX's in the other "Peter" graffito. But even if one accepts the reading of "Peter," the inscription may refer not to St. Peter, but to a pilgrim named Peter who visited the site.

The first letter (Pi) seems clear on the left. The last letter (C) is broken off at the end of the fragment. According to the excavators, the third, fourth and fifth letters (Tau, Rho and Upsilon) are combined in a monogram to form a cross, with another cross to the right. To the senior author of this article, however, critical elements in the putative monogram are part of two XX's defacing the underlying inscription, XX's similar to those in the other "Peter" inscription. Moreover, what the excavators see as a sigma appears rather clearly to be an omicron.

Even if these were references to the name Peter, they could well be references to pilgrims named Peter who wrote on these walls, rather than invocations of the name of St. Peter. For these reasons, we are skeptical of this alleged inscriptional support for identifying the original house as St. Peter's.

With what, then, are we left?

Was this originally St. Peter's house where Jesus stayed in Capernaum?

Reviewing the evidence, we can say with certainty that the site is ancient Capernaum. The house in question was located 84 feet south of the synagogue. Although the extant synagogue dates somewhere between the late second century and early fifth century, it is likely that an earlier synagogue stood on this same site.

The house in question was originally built in the late Hellenistic or early Roman period (about 60 B.C.E.). It was constructed of abundantly available, rough, black basalt boulders. It had a number of small rooms, two courtyards and one large room. When it was built, it was indistinguishable from all the other houses in the ancient seaside town.

Sometime about the middle of the first century C.E. the function of the building changed. It was no longer used as a house. Domestic pottery disappeared. The center room, including the floor, was plastered and re-plastered. The walls were covered with pictures. Only this center room was treated in this way. Christian inscriptions, including the name of Jesus and crosses, were scratched on the walls; some may possibly refer to Peter. Remnants of oil lamps and storage jars have been recovered. Fishing hooks have been found in between layers on the floor.

In a later century, two pilasters were erected on the north and south walls of this room; the lower parts of the pilasters have been found in the excavations. These pilasters supported a stone arch which in turn supported a new roof, no longer a light roof of branches, mud and straw, but a high masonry roof. On the eastern side of what had now become a house church, an atrium was constructed in the fourth century about 27 feet long and 10 feet wide. Finally, a wall was built around the sacred compound.

This house church survived into the mid-fifth century. Then precisely over the now plastered central room, an octagonal church was built, covering the same area and with the same dimensions. This was the kind of structure used to commemorate a special place in Christian history.

In addition, we know that as early as the fourth century, Christian pilgrims on visits to the site saw what they believed to be St. Peter's house. Sometime between 381 C.E. and 395 C.E. a Spanish nun named Egeria (Etheria) visited the site and reported in her diary that she had seen the house of St. Peter which had been turned into a church: "In Capernaum a house church (*domus ecclesia*) was made out of the home of the prince of the apostles, whose walls still stand today as they were." A similar report appears in the diary of the anonymous sixth-century C.E. Italian traveler known as the Pilgrim of Piacenza. However, by this time the octagonal church had been constructed, so he refers to a church that had been built on the site: "We came to

Capernaum to the house of St. Peter, which is now a basilica." Thus, even from this very early period, the site was associated with St. Peter's house.

Is this then the house of St. Peter? It cannot be confirmed—certainly not by inscriptions referring to St. Peter. But a considerable body of circumstantial evidence does point to its identification as St. Peter's house. Though we moderns search for proof, that hardly mattered to those ancient pilgrims who scratched their prayers on the walls of the house church in the belief that this was, indeed, St. Peter's house. So, for that matter, what "proof" does a modern pilgrim need?

The Siloam Pool

Where Jesus Cured the Blind Man

By Hershel Shanks



Todd Bolen/bibleplaces.com

While watching municipal workers replace a sewer pipe in the City of David, south of Jerusalem's Temple Mount, archaeologist Eli Shukron noticed that the construction equipment had revealed two ancient steps. Shukron quickly notified his colleague Ronny Reich, who identified the steps as part of the Pool of Siloam from the late Second Temple Period (first century B.C.E.–first century C.E.), as further excavations soon confirmed. It was at the Pool of Siloam, according to the Gospel of John, that Jesus cured the blind man (John 9:1–11).

Few places better illustrate the layered history that archaeology uncovers than the little ridge known as the City of David, the oldest inhabited part of Jerusalem. For example, to tell the story of the Pool of Siloam, where Jesus cured the blind man, we must go back 700 years before that—to the time of the Assyrian monarch Sennacherib and his siege of Jerusalem.

Hezekiah, the Judahite king at that time, could see the Assyrian siege coming. Protective steps were clearly called for, especially to protect Jerusalem's water supply. The only source of fresh water at this time was the Gihon Spring, near the floor of the adjacent Kidron Valley. So Hezekiah decided on a major engineering project—he would construct a tunnel under the ridge on which the City of David lay to bring the water of the spring to the other, less vulnerable, side of

Jerusalem. It was dug by two teams of tunnelers working from opposite ends, meeting in the middle—it's still a mystery how they managed to meet, but they did. A memorial plaque was carved in the tunnel wall to commemorate the feat—the famous Siloam Inscription, now in the Istanbul Museum (it was discovered in Ottoman times). Water flowed through the tunnel from the spring to the Pool of Siloam at the other end. It is still known as Hezekiah's Tunnel, and it is still a thrill for tourists to walk through its 1750-foot length.

The newly discovered pool is adjacent to an area referred to as the King's Garden and is just southeast of what had long been called the Pool of Siloam.



The waters of Siloam are mentioned by the prophet Isaiah, a contemporary of Hezekiah's, who refers to "the gently flowing waters of Siloam" (Shiloah in Hebrew) (Isaiah 8:6). When the exiles returned from Babylon and rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah tell us that a certain Shallun rebuilt "the wall of the Pool of Shiloah by the King's Garden" (Nehemiah 3:15).

In Jesus' time the Pool of Siloam figures in the cure of a man who had been blind from birth. Jesus spits on the ground and mixes his saliva with the mud, which he smears on the blind man's eyes. He then tells the man "to wash in the Pool of Siloam." When the blind man does so, he is able to see (John 9:1–7).

We still haven't found the Pool of Siloam from Isaiah's and Hezekiah's time. We're not even sure where it was. The same is true regarding the pool in Nehemiah's time. In the Byzantine period the empress Eudocia (c. 400–460 C.E.) built a church and a pool where the water debouches from Hezekiah's Tunnel to commemorate the miracle of the blind man. Early in the last century archaeologists found the remains of that church, over which today sits a mosque. The church and the pool are mentioned in several Byzantine pilgrim itineraries. Until last year, it was this pool that people meant when they talked of the Pool of Siloam.

Now we have found an earlier pool, the pool as it existed in Jesus' time—and it is a much grander affair.



Hershel Shanks

Three sets of stairs, each with five steps, have been uncovered at the New Testament-era Pool of Siloam. The excavators have exposed an area 225 feet long on one side of the pool and have reached both corners of that side. The corners are somewhat greater than 90 degrees (right), indicating that the pool was not a square but a trapezoid.

As with so much in archaeology, it was stumbled on, not part of a planned excavation. In June 2004 archaeologists Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron were digging in the area of the Gihon Spring where Hezekiah's Tunnel begins. Far to the south, between the end of the rock ridge that forms the City of David and a lush green orchard that is often identified as the Biblical King's Garden, is a narrow alley through which a sewer pipe runs carrying waste from the valley west of the City of David into the Kidron Valley east of the City of David. The city authorities needed to repair or replace this sewer and sent workers with heavy equipment to do some excavating. Eli was watching the operation, when suddenly he saw two steps appear. He immediately halted the work and called Ronny, who came rushing down. As soon as Ronny saw the steps, he exclaimed, "These must be steps going down to the Pool of Siloam during the Second Temple Period." He took a few pictures and wrote a report to Jon Seligman, the district archaeologist for Jerusalem. A quick response was called for because the winter rains were fast approaching and

the sewer pipe had to be repaired or replaced. Ronny and Eli were quickly authorized to excavate the area on behalf of the Israeli Antiquities Authority. The more they excavated, the more steps they found, and the wider the steps became.

They have now excavated the entire length of the steps on the side adjacent to the rock ridge of the City of David. There are in fact three short segments of descending stairways of five steps each. The first leads down to a narrow landing. The second leads to another landing and the third leads down to the final level (so far). The size of the pool itself would vary, depending on the level of the water. When it was full, it probably covered all of the steps. The landings served as a kind of esplanade for people to stand on when the steps were submerged in water.



Hershel Shanks

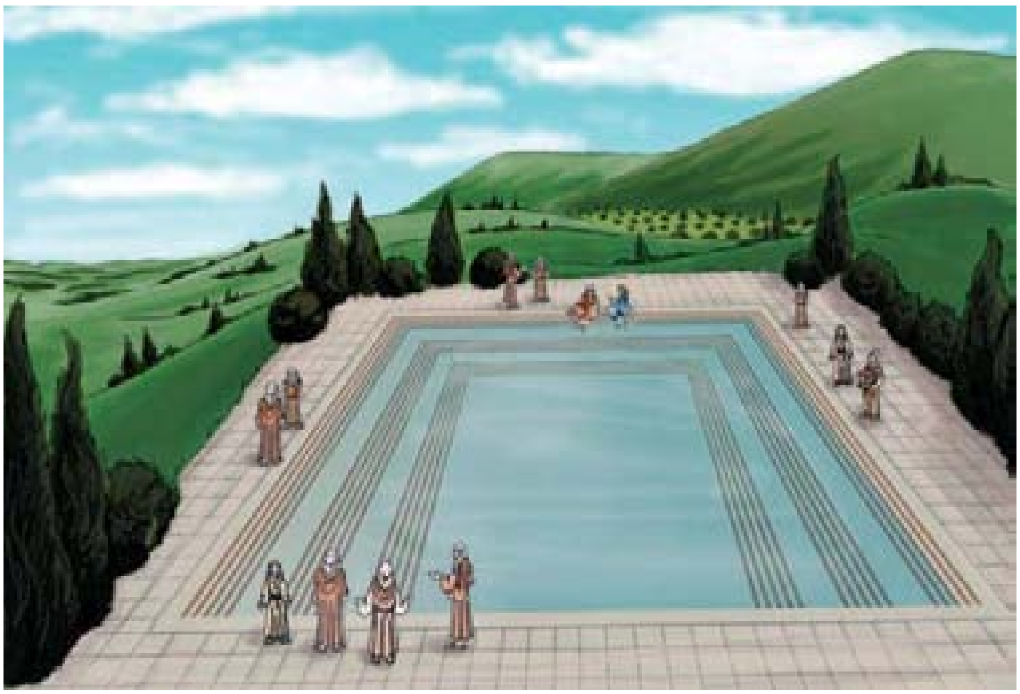
Ronny Reich was the first to identify the steps as part of the Pool of Siloam from the time of Jesus. Now the leading archaeologist specializing in Jerusalem, Reich worked with the late Nahman Avigad in the Old City's Jewish Quarter and has also dug at the western wall of the Temple Mount. His excavations at the Gihon Spring have revolutionized our understanding of the city's ancient water supply system.

The archaeologists also uncovered the two stepped corners at either end of these steps. So we know how wide the pool was at this point: more than 225 feet. We also know that the steps existed on at least three sides of the pool.

The corners are not exactly at right angles, however; they are a little more than 90 degrees. The pool appears to have been a trapezoid, widening apron-like as it descends into the valley. How far into the valley the pool extended, the archaeologists are not sure. Ronny's best guess is that it is about the same as the width of the pool on the side they have uncovered.

Many times archaeologists are unsure of the date of what they find. But in this case, there is no question. Ideally, archaeologists want two dates: the date of construction and the date when the facility went out of use. Here the archaeologists are fortunate to have both.

The pool had two phases. The stone steps are part of the second phase. Under the stone steps and in places where the stones are missing, the excavators were able see that in the first phase the steps were plastered. Only in the second phase were the steps faced with stones. The excavators went over the early steps with a metal detector, and in four places it beeped, revealing four coins *in the plaster*. These coins would date the first phase of the pool.



Jason Clark

The Siloam Pool as it might have looked during the New Testament era is shown here in an artist's rendition. Bathers would have enjoyed a view of the Kidron Valley, just east of the City of David. In the Gospel of John, when Jesus cures the blind man, he tells him, "Go to Siloam and wash" (John 9:11). The pool probably served as a *miqveh*, a Jewish ritual bath.

They were all coins of Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 B.C.E.), one of the later Hasmonean (Jewish) kings who were succeeded in 37 B.C.E. by Herod the Great. The excavators cannot be sure precisely how long these coins were in circulation before being embedded in the plaster of the first phase of the Pool of Siloam. But they can say with some assurance that the pool was constructed in the late Hasmonean period or early Herodian period. They may know more precisely if they dig under the steps and find a coin from Herod's time. Then the pool would be Herodian.





Hershel Shanks

A woman kneels to do her laundry in what had long been known as the Pool of Siloam. Byzantine-era Christians assumed this pool was the Biblical Siloam and built a church here. This pool was also a popular destination for pilgrims and was the subject of a 19th-century illustration by W.H. Bartlett (below). Thanks to the recent discovery, we now know that the Biblical Pool of Siloam was just southeast of this site.

We also know from coins how long the pool was in use. Near one corner of the pool they excavated part of a plaza or terrace and found nothing but late Second Temple pottery (which ended with the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.). Most significantly, they found a dozen coins from the period of the First Jewish Revolt against Rome. The revolt lasted from 66 to 70 C.E. The excavated coins date from years 2, 3 and 4 of the revolt. The pool was therefore used until the end of the revolt, after which it was abandoned.

This area, the lowest spot in all Jerusalem, was not inhabited again until the Byzantine period. Every year the winter rains flowing down the valley deposited another layer of mud in the pool. And after the Roman destruction of the city, the pool was no longer cleaned. Over the

centuries a thick layer of mud accumulated and the pool gradually disappeared. The archaeologists found it under nearly 10 feet of mud in places.

When Byzantine Christians returned to the area in the fourth century, they assumed the Pool of Siloam referred to in the New Testament was at the end of Hezekiah's Tunnel, so they built their pool and a commemorative church where the tunnel comes out of the rock. This pool figures in numerous 19th-century engravings. As late as the 1970s, Arab women still washed clothes in this pool. It is well worth a visit.



Associated Press / World Wide Photos

Four coins, including the one shown here, embedded in the plaster of the newly discovered Siloam Pool, show that the pool was in existence at the time of Jesus. All four date to the rule of Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 B.C.E.), one of the later Hasmonean kings.

What function the Pool of Siloam served in Jesus' time is not entirely clear. Undoubtedly, thousands of pilgrims would come to Jerusalem on the three Biblically ordained pilgrim festivals—Passover, Weeks (Pentacost, or Shavuoth) and Tabernacles (Succoth). They may well have camped in the adjacent Kidron Valley and been supplied with drinking and cooking water from the pool. The water in the pool would also qualify as a *miqveh*, for ritual bathing, points out Reich, who is a leading expert on *miqvaot*. Indeed its naturally flowing spring water was of the highest level of sanctity. The water in a *miqveh* is usually standing water, even though it is required to flow into the pool naturally. But here the spring flowed continuously, refreshing the water. However, ritual bathing in a *miqveh* must be in the nude. Perhaps there was some means of providing privacy.

Whether the Pool of Siloam in Hezekiah and Isaiah's time was located in the same place as in Jesus' time remains a question. Even if it was in the same spot, it may have been a different size. Ronny and Eli would like to make a cut under the steps, which would give some indication of

an earlier pool. If they find Iron Age pottery (tenth-sixth century B.C.E.), they can conclude that the Pool of Siloam from Hezekiah's and Isaiah's time was in this same location. However, Ronny and Eli do not want to dig into the verdant orchard that now fills the unexcavated portion of the New Testament-era Pool of Siloam. Besides, it belongs to the Greek Orthodox Church, which, like Ronny and Eli, would not want the orchard destroyed. But they would like to make a very small cut through the trees to see how deep the pool is and to learn whether there are Iron Age remains beneath. Perhaps the church, appreciating the significance of this place, will permit this. The church's orchard suddenly has great significance for the history of its faith.

Ashkelon's Arched Gate



Courtesy Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon

The world's oldest arched gateway was discovered at Ashkelon in the summer of 1992. The gate was originally built during the Middle Bronze Age, c. 1850 B.C.E.

The world's oldest known monumental arch, part of a gateway, has been unearthed by the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon, headed by Harvard professor Lawrence E. Stager. Some older arches have been found in Mesopotamia and Egypt but they are smaller and part of domestic dwellings or subterranean chambers, not in public settings. The Ashkelon arch dates to 1900–1750 B.C.E. and measures 11.5 feet high and 8 feet wide on the inside. The structure, made of sun-dried bricks, is thought to have been the innermost of three arched gateways through which one entered the city from the north.

When Canaanites and Philistines Ruled Ashkelon

By Lawrence E. Stager



Carl Andrews, courtesy Leon Levy Expedition

A daunting slope outside Ashkelon's northern gate would have dissuaded many an attacker bent on conquest. The approximately 40-degree slope is not a natural feature but rather an artificial earthwork that was the base of an enormous fortification system throughout much of Ashkelon's history. The ramparts date to Middle Bronze Age II (c. 2000–1550 B.C.E.) and were rebuilt four times in that period alone.

Abutting the Mediterranean Sea in modern-day Israel, Ashkelon was a center, in turn, of Canaanite, Philistine, Phoenician, Roman, Byzantine and Islamic cultures. It was a member of the Philistine pentapolis, or league of five cities, and appears frequently in the Bible. Samson killed 30 men there in a rage (Judges 14:19); David, after he heard of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, cried, "Publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon" (2 Samuel 1:20); and Zephaniah predicted that "Ashkelon shall become a desolation" (Zephaniah 2:4).

Ashkelon. The summer of 1990. The sixth season of the Leon Levy Expedition, sponsored by the Harvard Semitic Museum. In the waning days of the season, on the outskirts of the Canaanite city, we excavated an exquisitely crafted statuette of a silver calf, a religious icon associated with the worship of El or Baal in Canaan and, later, with the Israelite God, Yahweh. The calf lay buried in the debris on the ancient rampart that had protected the city in the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000–1550 B.C.E.).



Carl Andrews, courtesy Leon Levy Expedition

Silver calf discovered at Ashkelon. This religious icon, associated with the worship of El or Baal in Canaan, was discovered in the debris of the Middle Bronze Age II rampart. The calf, cast of solid bronze, was found remarkably well preserved. Grooves along the calf's back and underside and around the neck still contain silver, as do parts of the legs, head and tail, leading excavators to conclude that the figurine was once completely covered by a sheet of silver.

The calf was housed in a pottery vessel in the shape of a miniature religious shrine, which itself had been placed in one of the storerooms of a sanctuary on the slope shortly before the destruction of the seaport in about 1550 B.C.E. The date is secure. Other pottery found in the sanctuary dates to the terminal phase of the Middle Bronze Age (MBIIC, c. 1600–1550 B.C.E.).

A merchant approaching the Canaanite city from the Mediterranean on the road leading up from the sea would have been dwarfed by the imposing earthworks and towering fortifications on the northern slope of the city. About 300 feet along his ascent from the sea, he might have paused to make an offering at the Sanctuary of the Silver Calf, just off the roadway to the right—nestled in the lower flank of the rampart. Farther up the road to the east, the merchant would have entered the vast metropolis of Ashkelon through the city gate on the north.

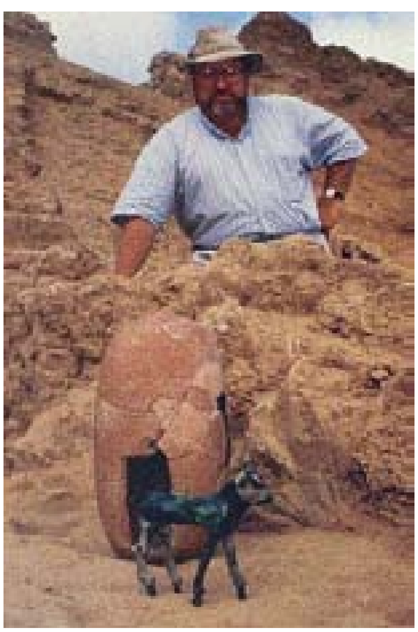
The silver calf was nearly complete and assembled when we found it. Only one horn was missing, and only the right foreleg was detached from the rest of the body. Less than 4.5 inches long and 4 inches high, the calf nevertheless weighs nearly a pound (14 oz.). It is a superb example of Canaanite metalwork. The delicate and naturalistic rendering of the features leave no doubt about the quality of the craftsmanship—or about the age and sex of the small animal: It is a young male calf, yet old enough to have developed horns. The body is made of bronze; only 2 to 5 percent is tin, the rest, copper. It was cast solid, except for the horns, ears and tail and the right foreleg and left hindleg. These two legs were cast separately and joined to the rest of the calf by

tenons (projections) and riveted in place. The sole surviving horn, the ears and the tail were made of forged copper[a] and inserted into the body. Tenons also extended below the hooves. These were obviously used to mount the statuette on a small platform or dais, which perished or disappeared in antiquity. The calf was once completely covered with a thick overleaf of pure silver. Deep grooves running along the back and underside of its bronze body and around its neck still contain remnants of the silver sheet. Some of the silver overleaf has also survived on the legs, head and tail.



Drawing by Andrew Herscher

The artist's rendition, with its exaggerated, "fish-eye" angles, depicts how Ashkelon's northern gate might have appeared in the 16th century B.C.E. A visitor, perhaps a seafaring trader from Phoenicia, might well have paused at the Sanctuary of the Calf at the base of the slope to present an offering of thanks for a safe journey and then made his way up the slope to the impressive twin-towered gate.

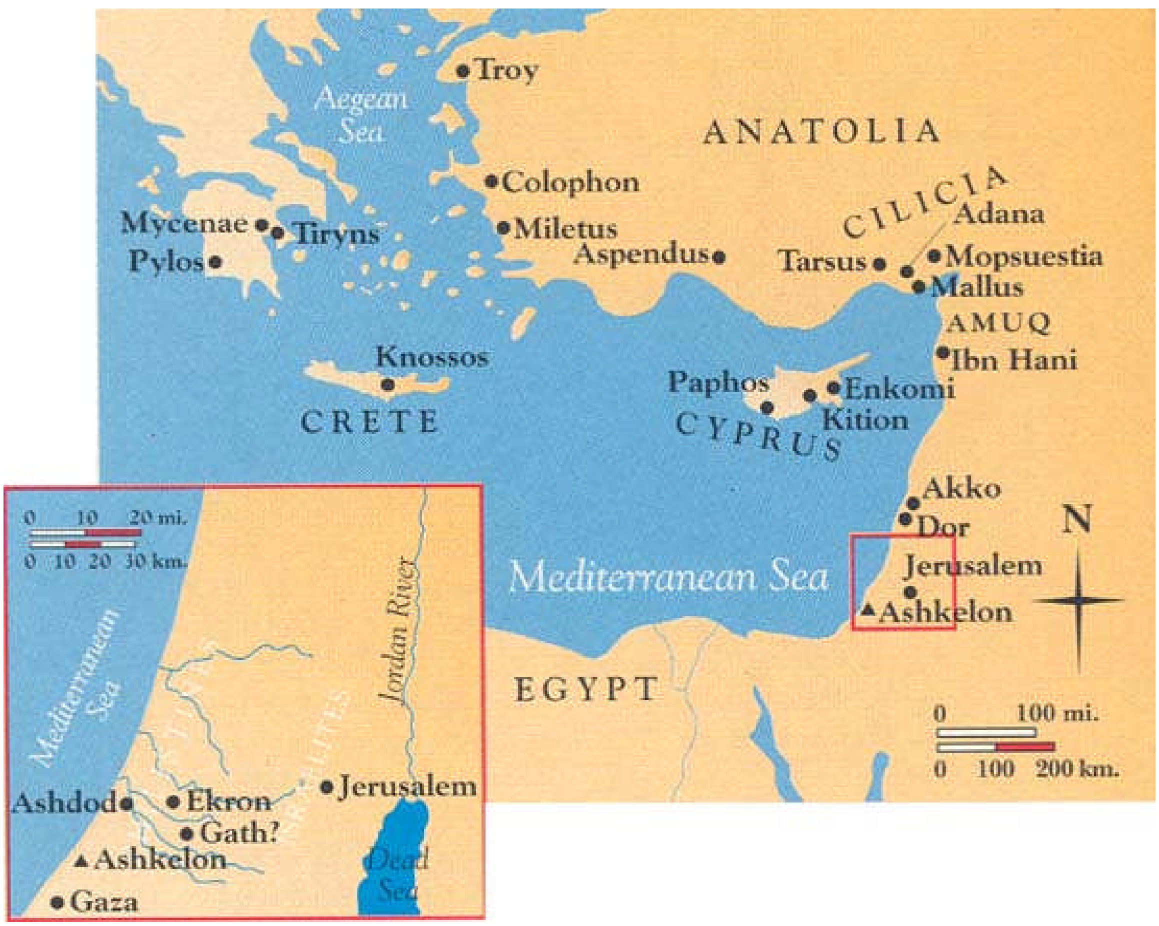


Its shrine repaired, the Ashkelon silver calf stands beneath the proud gaze of author Stager, Ashkelon's chief excavator. The opening of the shrine is just wide enough for the calf to pass through. A clay door once covered the opening. The excavators believe the calf was displayed emerging from the shrine.

Carl Andrews, courtesy Leon Levy

The ceramic model shrine that housed the calf is a cylinder with a beehive roof. It has a knob on top of the roof and a flat bottom. A doorway raised slightly above the floor is just large enough for the calf to pass through. Hinge scars on the door jambs indicate where a separate clay door had once been fitted into place.

*Expedition*The silver calf was just one of the many splendors of Ashkelon during this period, the apex of Canaanite culture in the Levant. During the first half of the second millennium B.C.E., Askhelon was one of the largest and richest seaports in the Mediterranean. Its massive ramparts formed an arc of earthworks extending over a mile and a half and enclosing a city of more than 150 acres, with probably 15,000 inhabitants, nestled beside the sea. On the north side of the city, where we excavated, the gates and fortifications had been rebuilt at least four times during the 150 years of the Middle Bronze IIB-C periods (1700–1550 B.C.E.).





Richard Cleave, courtesy Leon Levy Expedition

Ashkelon on the sea. An arc of earthworks one-and-a-half miles long encloses the immense 150-acre ancient city. Built over a 3,500-year span, from 2000 B.C.E. to 1500 C.E., the protective rampart defines the flat, semicircular mound on which the ancient city stood. Today the Yadin National Park, named after famed Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin, who died in 1984, lies inside the 150-acre mound.

This magnificent city was probably destroyed by the Egyptians in the aftermath of the "Hyksos expulsion." The Hyksos were an Asiatic people, probably Canaanites (some of whom might have originated in Ashkelon), who had imposed Canaanite hegemony over much of Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period (c. 1650–1550 B.C.E.), until the Egyptians managed to expel them forcibly, pursuing them back into Canaan.



Carl Andrews, courtesy Leon Levy Expedition

The Canaanite way of death. An adolescent Canaanite girl lies in a flexed position in a mudbrick-lined vault covered with wooden boughs and coated with white plaster At her shoulder the excavators found two toggle pins, for fastening a garment; three Egyptian scarabs and an ivory roundel lay on her midsection. The burial also contained Syrian and Cypriot pottery (see below). The scarabs and the Cypriot pottery helped excavators date the burial to about 1500 B.C.E., indicating that Ashkelon had revived after the Egyptians destroyed parts of the seaport about 50 years earlier.



Ilan Sztulman, courtesy Leon Levy Expedition

The silver calf from Ashkelon is a very early, rare example of bovine iconography in metal. Bull or calf symbolism expressed in metal and other media was associated with El or Baal, leading deities in the Canaanite pantheon. This tradition provided the progenitors of later Biblical iconography that linked Yahweh, the Israelite God, with golden and silver calf-images.

During their formative period (before about 1200 B.C.E.), the early Israelites borrowed heavily from Canaanite culture, even while, at the same time, they distanced themselves from their neighbors. When, in about 925 B.C.E. the kingdom split in two, with Israel in the north and Judah in the south, Jeroboam, the first king of the northern kingdom installed “golden calves” in the official sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel. The association of Yahweh with such images was obviously acceptable there. However, prophets like Hosea and rival priests from Jerusalem (the capital of the southern kingdom) condemned calf symbolism as idolatry. The words of Hosea not only provide us with a polemic against calf iconography, they also tell us how these images were made and how they were revered:

> Ephraim [the northern kingdom] was … guilty of Baal-worship; he suffered death. Yet now they sin more and more; they cast for themselves images; they use their silver to make idols, all fashioned by craftsmen. It is said of Ephraim: “They offer human sacrifices and kiss calf-images” (Hosea 13:1–2).

With but this taste of Canaanite Ashkelon, let us pass on to Philistine Ashkelon. That is the Ashkelon of the Bible.

Both Biblical and cuneiform texts make it clear that Ashkelon was a Philistine city during most of the Iron Age (c. 1200–586 B.C.E.). During that time it was a member of the famous Philistine Pentapolis[b] that also included Ekron, Gaza, Gath and Ashdod. When the Philistines (or an earlier vanguard of their ethnic tradition) arrived in coastal Canaan is a hotly debated issue, to which we will return later.

In 604 B.C.E. Ashkelon, like its sister-city Ekron, was destroyed by King Nebuchadrezzar (also called Nebuchadnezzar) and his neo-Babylonian army. Less than 20 years later (in 586 B.C.E.) Nebuchadrezzar would destroy Jerusalem and the Temple built by King Solomon.

The last Philistine king of Ashkelon, Aga’, and his sons, as well as sailors and various nobles, were exiled to Babylon, just as many Jews were after the fall of Jerusalem. Unlike the Jews, however, we hear nothing about the return of the Philistines to their native land. Those that remained behind later lost their ethnic identity, although the region they once occupied and dominated culturally, was still identified as Philistia, or Palestine, by the Romans hundreds of

years later; today, many Arabs call themselves Palestinians, echoing their Philistine namesakes of the distant past.

When my predecessor at Ashkelon, the British archaeologist John Garstang, readied his expedition in 1920, he supposed that Philistine Ashkelon was a comparatively small site, occupying only the south mound known as al-Hadra, a mere 15 acres. He had no idea that, even there, the Philistine cities lay buried under 12 to 15 feet of later civilizations. Digging from the top of the mound, Garstang soon despaired of ever reaching anything earlier than the Hellenistic period. After two seasons of excavation (1920–1921), he abandoned Ashkelon for a less complicated site.

During that same two-season period, however, Garstang's young assistant, W. Phythian-Adams was rather more clever. He succeeded in locating both earlier Philistine and Canaunite levels.

Phythian-Adams nibbled away at the north (Grid 38) and west (between Grids 50 and 57) sides of al-Hadra with two step trenches. These small-scale excavations documented a continuous sequence of occupation from about 2000 B.C.E. (beginning of Middle Bronze IIA) to the modern era. Unfortunately, Phythian-Adams recorded the location of these two step trenches, one no bigger than a telephone booth, only by the designation of the plot number on the official Ottoman land registry. These numbers identify fields approximately 300 feet long. Nevertheless, it was our very good fortune to have established our two main trenches next to his during our opening season. Once we discovered this, we were reassured that here Iron and Bronze Age levels lay below later cultural remains.

What we did not know, until last season, was how big Philistine Ashkelon really was. Over 2,000 feet north of al-Hadra, we found Philistine fortifications—a massive mudbrick tower 34 feet by 20 feet and a huge glacis-type[c] rampart. These protected a Philistine seaport not of 15 acres, but of over 150 acres. These fortifications were built in about 1150 B.C.E. Ashkelon, like Ekron and Ashdod (also recently excavated), was a large, heavily fortified city of the Philistines. Farther north at Dor, a city of the Sikils (according to the Egyptian "Tale of Wen-Amon"), excavations have revealed not only the Sea Peoples' harbor but also their fortifications and glacis of the 12th century B.C.E.[1]

In contrast to the Israelites, especially the rustic ridge-dwellers of the central hill country, the Philistines of the plain appear to have been far more urbane and sophisticated, thus belying the dictionary definition of a Philistine as a person who is lacking in or smugly indifferent to culture

and aesthetic refinement. This negative portrayal derives ultimately from the Bible, of course, written by bitter enemies of the Philistines. When the early Israelites were using coarse, unpainted pottery, for example, the Philistines were already decorating their pottery with imaginative bichrome motifs and figures, such as fishes and birds.

Our staff zoo-archaeologists, Dr. Paula Wapnish and Professor Brian Hesse of the University of Alabama in Birmingham, have begun to document a rather dramatic shift in domesticated species at the end of the Late Bronze Age (13th century B.C.E.) and the beginning of the Iron Age (12th century B.C.E.). The shift is from sheep and goats to pigs and cattle. This shift occurred at Ashkelon and other coastal sites, but not in the central highland villages of the same period dominated by Israelites—settlements like Ai, Raddana and Ebal.[2] From a strictly ecological perspective, this seems surprising. The oak-pine-and-terebinth woodlands that dominated the central hill country of Canaan, where the earliest Israelite settlements of about 1200 B.C.E. are to be found, are ideally suited for pig production, especially because of the shade and acorns. One reason why such a hog-acorn economy did not thrive in the early Israelite environment must ultimately be rooted in very early religious taboos that forbade the consumption of pork. If so, these findings would nullify the hypothesis of anthropologist Marvin Harris that "kosher" rules can be explained primarily by ecological considerations.[3] These findings would also contradict those scholars who argue for a much later date for the introduction of these dietary restrictions.

As noted earlier, when the Philistines arrived on the coast of Canaan is still a vexed question, although it is becoming increasingly clear where they came from. Two leading experts in the definition of Philistine culture, Professors Trude and Moshe Dothan, have argued that a generation before the Philistines themselves arrived, a pre-Philistine group of Sea Peoples landed on the coast of Canaan. The arrival of the Philistines is marked, in their view, by the appearance in Canaan of what has become known as Philistine bichrome ware, a distinctive red and black decorated pottery. An earlier monochrome pottery has been identified by them with an earlier generation of pre-Philistine Sea Peoples.[4]

Unlike the Dothans, I believe this earlier monochrome pottery indicates the earliest phase of Philistine settlement in southern Canaan, just as it serves as the hallmark of new groups of Sea Peoples settling all along the Levantine coast and in Cyprus in the first half of the 12th century B.C.E. Trude Dothan has provided us with a detailed typology of the hybrid pottery style known as Philistine bichrome ware. Her analysis leaves little doubt that this distinctive red and black decorated pottery, as well as many of its shapes and motifs, derives ultimately from the Mycenaean Greek world, with more limited inspiration from Cypriot, Egyptian and Canaanite

sources. However, recent excavations at three of the five members of the Philistine Pentapolis—Ashdod, Ekron (Tel Miqne) and now Ashkelon—indicate the direct antecedent of this bichrome ware was a monochrome pottery even closer to Mycenaean Greek pottery prototypes than the bichrome ware.[5] Moreover, the monochrome pottery was made in Canaan, as we know from the clays.

At Ashkelon in Grid 38 (lower) we have documented stratigraphically the sequence from monochrome ware (Mycenaean IIIC:1) to bichrome ware (Philistine). Beneath the floors of a large public building with thick stone column drums was an earlier building. On its floor lay the earliest Philistine pottery yet discovered at Ashkelon; carinated bowls with strap handles and bell-shaped bowls, decorated with monochrome antithetic spirals, horizontal bands, net-patterned lozenges and tongue and wing motifs on the exterior and with horizontal bands and spirals on the interior.

When did the Philistines arrive *en masse* on the shores of Canaan? An early contingent of Sea Peoples fought with the Libyans against the Egyptian pharaoh Merneptah (1212–1202 B.C.E.), as we know from the famous Merneptah Stele, but the Peleset, or Philistines, were not among them. Merneptah quelled another revolt in 1207 B.C.E., also recorded on the Merneptah Stele, led by the Canaanites of Ashkelon, Gezer, Yanoam and the Israelites. That there were Canaanites, rather than Sea Peoples, in Ashkelon at this time is shown by wall reliefs once assigned to Ramesses II—now properly dated to his son Merneptah—apparently depicting his Canaanite campaign.[d] The people inside the ramparts of Ashkelon are depicted in these reliefs as Canaanites, not as Sea Peoples. Moreover, at that time Mycenaean and Cypriot pottery was still being *imported* into the Levant. So the Sea Peoples apparently did not arrive in Canaan until after the reign of Merneptah.[6]

Not until the reign of Ramesses III (1182–1151 B.C.E.) do we find the locally made Mycenaean-style pottery in the Levant diverging from the earlier and purer Mycenaean prototypes. This reflects a change from trade items coming from comparatively few production centers in the Mediterranean world to locally manufactured pottery at a number of regional centers.

In his famous inscription known as the “War Against the Sea Peoples,” Ramesses III describes the Philistine approach to Canaan and his subsequent victory over them. He refers to the Philistines by their name as written in Egyptian hieroglyphics, “Peleset.” In accompanying reliefs on the walls of the temple at Medinet Habu, Ramesses III depicts the Philistines, as well as other well-armed Sea Peoples. These reliefs date to about 1175 B.C.E. These Philistines should be identified with the monochrome pottery that appears in Canaan at about this time.

In short, although Philistine bichrome ware was once thought to herald the arrival of the Philistines early in the reign of Ramesses III (c. 1180–1175), it now appears that the bichrome pottery was dated a bit too early. The monochrome pottery that appears a generation earlier actually marks the first appearance of the Philistines in Canaan, during the reign of Ramesses III.[7]

A closer look at this pottery will also help solve the riddle of Philistine origins.

When tested by neutron activation analysis,[e] the early monochrome Mycenaean IIIC pottery proved to have been made from local clays, whether at Ashdod and Ekron in Philistia or at Enkomi, Kition and Old Paphos on Cyprus.[8] Almost none of it was imported. Although we must always be cautious about inferring new peoples from pots, I think it can be argued in this case that when this locally made Mycenaean pottery appears in quantity in the eastern Mediterranean, it indeed marks the arrival of the Sea Peoples. Their path of destruction along the eastern Mediterranean coast can be traced from Cilicia, in southwest Turkey, at such sites as Miletus and Tarsus, to the Amuq (or Plains of Antioch), south to Ibn Hani (the seaside resort of the kings of Ugarit in the 14th and 13th centuries B.C.E.), in Syria; farther south to coastal Canaan at Acco; and on down the coast through Philistia.[9]

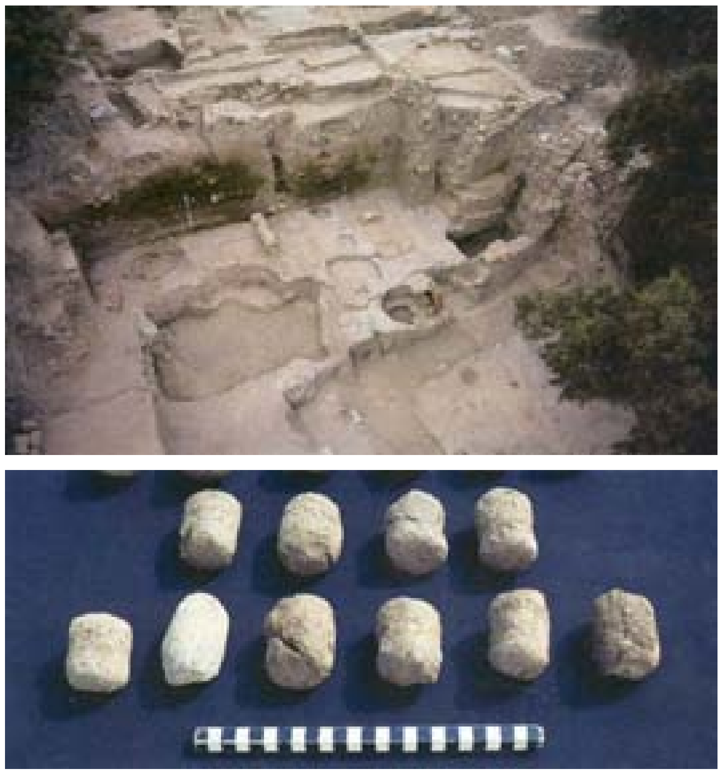
As these groups of peoples migrated throughout the eastern Mediterranean coast, their potters no longer shared a common tradition. Thus, it makes little sense to try to put the Mycenaean IIIC styles into an interregional sequence, since local styles quickly diverged from a common template, influenced as they were by very different local surroundings.[10]

When the Philistines first arrived in southern Canaan (c. 1175 B.C.E.), they made Mycenaean-style pottery using the local clays. Later, in about 1150 B.C.E., they assimilated Canaanite, Egyptian and other motifs, making the hybrid that archaeologists have for years called "Philistine" pottery. Perhaps we should now call it second-generation Philistine pottery. In fact, the Philistines arrived on the coast and settled in the Pentapolis a generation or more before the production of the bichrome pottery that bears their name.

What we have outlined archaeologically and dated to the early part of Pharaoh Ramesses III's reign is described in very vivid terms by Ramesses III himself in his "War Against the Sea Peoples":

> "Dateline: Year 8 under the Majesty of Ramesses III [c. 1175 B.C.E.]: …The foreign countries [Sea Peoples] made a conspiracy in their islands. All at once

> the lands were removed and scattered in the fray. No land could stand before their arms, from Hatti, Kode [Cilicia], Carchemish, Arzawa and Alashiya [Cyprus] on, being cut off at [one time]. A camp [was set up] in one place in Amor [Amurru]. They desolated its people, and its land was like that which has never come into being. They were coming forward toward Egypt, while the flame was prepared before them. Their confederation [of Sea Peoples] was the Philistines, Tjeker [=Sikils], Shekelesh, Denye(n) and Weshesh lands united."[11]



James Whitred, courtesy Leon Levy Expedition/Carl Andrews, courtesy Leon Levy Expedition

Two 12th-century B.C.E. buildings (top) where excavators found 150 cylinders of unbaked clay (bottom). Excavators of the Philistine city of Ekron (Tel Miqne) also found small cylindrical objects very similar to those at Ashkelon. Thinking that perhaps they were clay writing tablets of some kind, both teams of excavators were hoping to find the first-ever examples of Philistine writing on these cylinders, but soon had to settle for a more mundane explanation of the objects' function: Tiny remnants of fibers, not visible to the human eye but found in the dirt nearby, indicated that the small clay objects were loomweights used in weaving.

As a logical inference from the archaeological evidence, we may add the following: If the makers of the local monochrome Mycenaean pottery (IIIC:1) settling along the coast from Cilicia in Anatolia to Cyprus and Israel are not Mycenaean Greeks themselves, then we must conclude that they studied their potmaking in Mycenaean workshops. And then they somehow convinced all of their "barbarian" consumers that this pottery was what they should use. Throwing caution to

the wind, I am willing to reject these possibilities and state flatly that the Sea Peoples, including the Philistines, were Mycenaean Greeks.

I am willing to speculate even further: When we do discover Philistine texts at Ashkelon or elsewhere in Philistia (and it's only a matter of time until this happens), those texts will be in Mycenaean Greek (that is, in Linear B or some related script). At that moment, we will be able to recover another lost civilization for world history.

We partially excavated two public buildings that were used in both the monochrome and bichrome phases of the Philistine occupation of Ashkelon. These two public buildings produced more than 150 enigmatic artifacts—thick cylinders of unbaked clay, slightly pinched at the waist. More than one row of these cylinders were found lying on the floors of both buildings. Whatever the function of these cylinders, it appears that the same type of activity was carried on in both the monochrome and bichrome phases of these 12th-century B.C.E. buildings.

As we were excavating these strange cylinders at Ashkelon, at nearby Tel Miqne (which the excavators identify as the Philistine city of Ekron) the diggers were finding the same strange objects at their site. Could they be tablets prepared for inscribing? Would we be able to find the first real evidence of Philistine writing? At both Ashkelon and Miqne, the dig directors eagerly tried to find the first signs of Philistine writings on these unbaked "tablets." But, alas, not a trace was found!

We then shifted to a more banal reading of the evidence. The alignment of the clay cylinders next to walls suggested that they had been dropped from vertical looms. Yet they looked unlike any loomweights we had ever seen. They were unperforated; Levantine loomweights had holes through which the vertical strand of thread from the loom was attached.

Egon Lass, research associate and grid supervisor, finally solved the mystery. His job includes systematically collecting samples from every square yard of excavated floors or surfaces at Ashkelon, and then wet-sieving them. In this way, Lass discovered that occupational debris from the floors with the strange, lined-up clay cylinders contained concentrations of fibers, fibers that could not be detected with the naked eye during excavation, but that appeared only after wet-sieving. Since these cylinders were associated with the weaving industry, they probably were loomweights. The thread was tied around the pinched waist, which was why they were not perforated with holes.

This homely clue looms (forgive the pun) large for determining the cultural homeland of the Philistines and other Sea Peoples.

To the pottery evidence, we can now add the even more persuasive evidence of the lowly loomweights found in abundance at both Ashkelon and Miqne-Ekron. Surely these artifacts made of unbaked clay, yet quite different from the local Levantine perforated type, were not imported from abroad, but were made and used by immigrant weavers.

In this same period (early 12th century B.C.E.), Achaeans or Mycenaeans are thought to have arrived *en masse* on Cyprus (Alashiya).[f] At two of the Cypriot settlements, Kition and Enkomi, this same type of unperforated loomweight (or "reels" as the excavators there called them) were found in abundance (along with the perforated Levantine ones) in rooms where weaving was being done. The most striking evidence for the origin of the Philistines and other Sea Peoples, however, is the appearance of cylindrical unperforated loomweights in the Mycenaean homeland itself, at centers such as Tiryns, Pylos and Mycenae. When the great archaeological pioneer Heinrich Schliemann was digging at Mycenae, he found numerous cylinders of unbaked clay, but was puzzled about what they were used for. By the time he finished work at Tiryns, where they were also quite common, he rightly surmised that "apparently they were used as weights for looms."[12] In this as in so many other instances, we have learned to take Schliemann's hunches seriously.



James Whitred, courtesy Leon Levy Expedition/Lawrence E. Stager

A Mediterranean wanderer. This impression (right) made from a terra-cotta mold (left) found at Ashkelon depicts Odysseus (also known by his Latinized name, Ulysses), the hero of Homer's *Odyssey*, battling the sea monster Scylla. Dating to the Roman period (first–second centuries C.E.), the impression shows Odysseus' spear pointing to the right. The sea monster's tail whips in front of Odysseus' face; heads of oarsmen can be seen below the spear and the head of the helmsman can be seen above the spear butt. The *Odyssey* describes the scene: "I put on my glorious armor and, taking up two long spears in my hands, I stood bestriding the vessel's foredeck at the prow, for I expected Scylla of the rocks to appear first from that direction."

Another clue to the Greek connection is the name of one of the Sea Peoples mentioned in Ramesses III's inscription, the Denyen, who have often been equated with the Danaoi of Homeric tradition. The latter term, frequent in the *Iliad*, is used interchangeably in Homer with "Achaeans," who were, of course, the Greeks.

Despite this Greek connection with Danaoi and the archaeological evidence of Philistines in Canaan, scholars have been hesitant to identify all the Sea Peoples with the Mycenaean Greeks. The Greeks are usually considered a minor constituent of the "barbarian" hordes that comprised the Sea Peoples. Modern connotations of "Philistine" (inspired, no doubt, by Biblical pejoratives) have not put scholars in a frame of mind that allows easy acceptance of these Sea People "barbarians" as elevated Greeks. But that is what the archaeology suggests. Nor has our upbringing in the classics helped; indeed it has probably hindered us from recognizing that the heroes of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*—the "good guys"—just might be akin to the "bad guys"—namely, the Sea Peoples.

According to Greek epic traditions, which give us the same story from the Greek perspective, some time after the Trojan War (the most widely accepted traditional date for the fall of Troy is about 1183 B.C.E.), several heroes were celebrated as shipwrecked wanderers trying desperately to return home to mainland Greece. The classic homecoming story is the *Odyssey*. Before Menelaus (who started the whole thing when he married Helen of Troy) returned to his native Sparta after the war, he wandered to Cyprus, Phoenicia, Egypt and Libya. During these difficult, but lucrative, wanderings, Menelaus accumulated much wealth, including such sumptuous items as "two silver bathtubs, and a pair of tripods, and ten talents of gold"—all given to him as "gifts" (however reluctantly) by an Egyptian from Thebes (*Odyssey* IV, 128–129).[13]

Odysseus himself, the hero of the *Odyssey*, got into trouble in Egypt, when Zeus "put it into [Odysseus'] head to go with roving pirates to Egypt." Odysseus' roguish companions plundered the fields of the Egyptians, captured women and children and killed the men. But the Egyptians did not sit idly by; they mounted a counterattack. According to the *Odyssey*, many of the Greek pirates were killed; others were led into captivity and made to work at forced labor. Luckily, Odysseus (for some unstated reason) was sent to Cyprus (*Odyssey* XVII, 425–445)

The adventures of Odysseus were still celebrated in Ashkelon in the Roman period, as I realized after piecing together what little remained of a pottery mold for making plaques. The mold depicted a warrior with spear and shield in hand standing before the mast. Below him were oarsmen and, to his right, a steersman. The key to the scene, however, is the tail of some kind of sea monster that whips up beside the defending warrior. The scene on the mold recalls the hair-

raising episode of Odysseus and the six-headed sea monster Scylla (or Skylla) described in the *Odyssey* (Book XII, 80ff.). Shortly before six of his men were devoured by Scylla, Odysseus ordered his crew to "Sit well, all of you, to your oarlocks, and dash your oars deep into the breaking surf of the water, so in that way Zeus might grant that we get clear of this danger and flee away from it. For you, steersman, I have this order; so store it deeply in your mind, as you control the steering oar of this hollow ship…" The visual imprint of Homer's words lay before us in this terra-cotta mold, with oarsmen and steersman clearly depicted but in Roman style of the first or second century C.E. The story was apparently celebrated in Ashkelon by people who still recalled their Greek heritage hundreds of years later.

Greek legends preserve many "homecoming" stories. In one of these epics (the fragmentary *Nostoi*[14]) some of the Greek heroes never make it back home after the Trojan War. Instead, they wander about the eastern Mediterranean, often with large followings of refugees, founding cities as they go. These founding legends have been preserved at local shrines dedicated to the founding hero.

Among the more remarkable founding stories dealing with what the German scholar Fritz Schachermeyr called the "Achaean Diaspora" are accounts of the colonization of Pamphylia and Cilicia in Asia Minor and Phoenicia on the coast of Canaan—from Colophon in the north to Ashkelon in the south.[15]

According to later legends, many Greeks left Troy for parts south under the leadership of one seer named Amphilochus and another named Calchas. At Clarus near Colophon, one Mopsus, who would become the founding hero of Ashkelon, defeated Calchas in a riddle contest. Tradition has preserved several different riddles that led to Calchas' defeat; here is one of them:

> "[Another] question propounded by Calchas was in regard to a pregnant sow, how many pigs she carried, and Mopsus said, 'Three, one of which is a female' … When Mopsus proved to have spoken the truth, Calchas died of grief."[16]

Riddles were very serious business indeed! Having replaced the original seer Calchas, Mopsus went on to lead his people across the Taurus Mountains into Pamphylia, where he founded two important cities: Aspendus and Phaselis. Mopsus then led other Achaeans on through Cilicia, founding Mallus and Mopsuestia (Mopsus' hearth). From Cilicia, Mopsus marched down the coast all the way to Ashkelon, where, according to the fifth-century Lydian historian Xanthus, Mopsus threw the statue of the mermaid goddess Atargatis (=Tanit/Ashtarte/Asherah) into her own sacred lake. Mopsus, according to this tradition, died in Ashkelon.[17]

According to Richard Barnett, Mopsus is the "first figure of Greek mythology to emerge into historical reality."[18] He says this because a bilingual inscription from the eighth century B.C.E., written in hieroglyphic Luwian and in Phoenician, was found at Karatepe in Cilicia. In this inscription, Azatiwatas, servant of the king of the Danuniyim (Homer's Danaoi), traces his lineage through the "house of MPS (=Mopsus)," indicating that there may have been a kernel of truth behind these Greek founding legends. I mentioned above that one of the cities Mopsus founded was Mopsuestia, which means Mopsus' hearth. Hearths were well known in Aegean and Anatolian cultures, but not in Canaan. Recently however, Israeli archaeologist Amihai Mazar discovered a small raised hearth in a public building adjacent to a Philistine temple at Tel Qasile.[19] Even more recently Trude Dothan and Seymour Gitin have found a sequence of circular, sunken stone-lined hearths in a monumental building at Philistine Miqne,[g] apparently another Greek element introduced into Canaan by the Philistines, or Sea Peoples.

This archaeological and textual analysis has led me to the inescapable conclusion that two very different cultures and peoples—one Semitic (comprised of Canaanites and Israelites); the other Greek—lived side by side in parts of Canaan.

In the context of these sometimes hostile, sometimes friendly neighbors, we are better able to understand some Biblical heroes as well as villains.

From this perspective it is not so fanciful to imagine Goliath (1 Samuel 17), the Philistine champion whom young David slew with his slingshot, as a mighty, well-armed warrior, similar to Achaeans like Achilles and Odysseus. At the very least, Goliath was equipped much more like an Achaean warrior, complete with bronze greaves on his legs, than like a Canaanite or Israelite soldier (for whom greaves were totally alien).

The adventures of the mighty Samson also reflect a Greek connection. Although the Bible identifies him as an Israelite hero from the tribe of Dan, he does not fit the mold of a typical Biblical Judge of the period, nor is he a leader of Israelite armies like the other Judges. He is instead an individual champion about whom many a tale was told. As recognized by many 19th-century Biblical scholars, Samson is much more like a Greek hero—specifically like Herakles—than a Biblical Judge.[20] In an insightful phrase in *Paradise Lost*, John Milton refers to our hero as the "Herculean Samson."

Samson is the only riddle-teller in the Bible. At his wedding feast to an unnamed Philistine woman from Timnah, Samson propounded this rather bad riddle to the 30 young men at the feast:

> "Out of the eater came something to eat,
> Out of the strong came something sweet."
> (Judges 14:14)

To know the answer to the riddle you must know that a year earlier Samson had killed a lion with his bare hands. When he passed by the spot on his way to his wedding, he found that a swarm of bees had made their home in the lion's carcass. He scooped out the honey and ate it with his hands.

The guests of course did not know this, so they could not guess the answer to the riddle. After much cajoling, however, Samson finally tells his Philistine bride the answer, which she promptly reveals on the last day of the feast to the male guests. And they answered:

> "What is sweeter than honey,
> And what is stronger than a lion?"

Samson then responded (with a trace of barnyard humor):

> "Had you not plowed with my heifer
> You would not have guessed my riddle!"
> (Judges 14:18)

Unlike the Greek seer Calchas, who died of grief when his riddle was answered, Samson simply pays off his bet of 30 linen tunics and 30 sets of clothing by going down to Philistine Ashkelon and killing 30 of its men. He strips them and gives their wardrobes to the guests who had answered the riddle.

Samson is also famous for his seven magical locks of hair. The Biblical writers transformed Samson into a Nazarite, a man dedicated to God. But, although he does not cut his hair, Samson hardly qualifies as the usual Nazarite: He drinks strong drink whenever he likes. Samson's long locks endow him with superhuman strength, however. When shorn, he is, the Bible says, much weaker, "like any man" (Judges 16:17). There is a parallel in Greek epic: Scylla cut her father's hair while he slept, thus removing his invincibility. The king was then captured by King Minos.[21]

The riddle, the magic locks and a hero of superhuman strength were not the stuff of Canaanite or Hebrew lore; they were, however, very much a part of the later Greek, and probably Mycenaean-Minoan, world.

The adventures of Samson took place in the foothills of Canaan, the Shephelah, an intermediate zone of economic, social and cultural exchange between Greeks and Israelites, between Philistines and Hebrews. This border zone with its hybrid cultural elements is reflected not only in the stories we have examined but in the archaeology as well. It is significant, I think, that archaeologists using material culture data have always been confused about the ethnic and cultural affinities of the inhabitants of this intermediate zone during Iron Age I (1200–1000 B.C.E.). Was Beth Shemesh, on the edge of the Shephelah, for example, an Israelite or a Philistine settlement during stratum III, the Iron I stratum? The signals are confusing and disagreement abounds.

The ancient inhabitants were probably no less confused, for this was taboo territory, the meeting-ground of alien cultures.

Indeed, there is some uncertainty and confusion about the very identity of Samson's tribe, Dan. Were the Danites originally Israelites or did they trace their origins to the Danaoi, the Greeks of Homeric epic?

According to Yigael Yadin, Cyrus H. Gordon and Allen H. Jones, the Danites of the Bible were identical with the Homeric Danaoi, the Egyptian Denyen (in Ramesses III's inscription), the Danuna (in the Amarna Letters of the 14th century B.C.E.) and the DNNYM (in a Phoenician inscription from Karatepe).[22] According to Yadin's reading of the Biblical text, Dan "dwells on ships" (Judges 5:17). Unlike other Israelite tribes, Dan lacks a genealogy (Genesis 46:23; cf. Numbers 26:42). Yadin therefore concludes that Dan was not one of the original Israelite tribes in the early confederation; nevertheless, "Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel" (Genesis 49:16). Yadin went even further and attempted to locate the Denyen/Danaoi/Danites in the area around Tel Aviv in the 12th century B.C.E., where he specifically identified the earliest settlement at Tel Qasile, stratum XII, with these immigrants. Eventually the Danites migrated north and established themselves at Laish/Dan in the north (Judges 18), by which time they were thoroughly integrated into the Tribal League of Israel during the period of the Judges.

While at first glance this hypothesis is extremely appealing, there are many reasons for rejecting it upon further reflection. First and foremost, texts relating to the Sea Peoples give us no indication about the location of the Denyen in the Levant. In the Amarna letters the Danuna seem

to be somewhere north of Ugarit in modern Syria. By the time of the Egyptian “Tale of Wen-Amon” (about 1050 B.C.E.), the Tjeker (or Sikils), occupied the seaport of Dor and surrounding territories.[23] Slightly earlier, the Onomasticon of Amenope (about 1100 B.C.E.) lists Philistines (Peleset), Sikils and Sherden—all Sea Peoples—living on the coast of the Levant. If this list is in geographical order, then the Philistines represent southern Canaan; the Sikils, the Dor region; and the Sherden, the Acco area.[24] In none of these texts are the Denyen even mentioned; however, this might be expected if in fact they migrated to Laish/Dan before 1100 B.C.E., as Avraham Biram, the excavator of Laish/Dan, believes they did. Unfortunately, for the Danite=Danaoi hypothesis, the earliest settlement at Laish/Dan which could plausibly be linked to the Danites (stratum VI) has yielded very little Philistine pottery; rather it is characterized by collared-rim store jars and pits—artifacts and features commonly associated with the early Israelites.[25] Furthermore, the Biblical texts relating to the Danites are open to other interpretations. The key text for Yadin—“And Dan, why did he remain in ships?” (Judges 5:17)—can also be interpreted to mean those Danites who served as clients on the ships of the Phoenicians or even the Sea Peoples.[h] In other words, the Danites were in a client/patron relationship with one of the seafaring peoples of the Levant, but this does not imply that the Danites themselves were Sea Peoples, or Phoenicians. As the Samson story indicates, the Danites were an Israelite tribe located on the western periphery of early Israel even before they moved north to Laish/Dan but were probably under the heavy influence of their coastal Sea Peoples neighbors.

The Samson saga represents a literary genre that Harvard Professor Frank Cross has labeled a “border epic” where two very different cultures—early Greek and Israelite—met on the coast of Canaan. The historical milieu, as I have reconstructed it first from archaeology and then assisted by texts, is a dynamic one in which these two very different cultures encounter each other, interact and transform their respective traditions.

The Massive Middle Bronze Fortifications: How Did They Work?

By Lawrence E. Stager

Sidebar to: When Canaanites and Philistines Ruled Ashkelon

Numerous theories have attempted to explain the function of the immense sloping defensive structures that enclosed many ancient cities in the Middle Bronze Age II (2000–1550 B.C.E.). Why so wide at the base? The rampart at Ashkelon, for example, is more than 50 feet high and more than 75 feet at the base.

At one time, most scholars attributed these formidable MB II fortifications to the "Hyksos," the enigmatic and supposedly non-Semitic people from the north, who, with their superior weapons of war, invaded and conquered Canaan and Egypt in the 17th century B.C.E. The Hyksos had chariots, even at this early date. Ashkelon's excavator, British archaeologist John Garstang, believed that Ashkelon's earthworks, like those of the "Lower City" of Hazor, surrounded, not a city, but a huge chariot park. Storing chariots and their horses required a wide, protected area; hence the huge earthworks. The inhabited portion of Ashkelon, Garstang thought, was confined to a small mound inside the wide arc of the earthen embankments.

Other scholars proposed that the earthworks were related to chariotry, but for the opposite purpose: to keep them out rather than in.

Yigael Yadin dispelled both notions. His excavations at Hazor showed that the city extended throughout the lower portions of the site and was surrounded by impressive earthworks that formed the base of the fortification system. The earthworks, in other words, surrounded not a chariot park but an entire city. We now believe this to be true at Ashkelon as well. As for the other theory—that the earthworks were meant to repel chariots—Yadin pointed out that chariot warfare took place not around cities but in open plains away from cities.

Yadin believed the earthworks at Hazor were built to counter the battering ram, also once thought to have been introduced by the Hyksos. This seems highly unlikely, however, since we know that in later periods, the besiegers, such as the Assyrian king Sennacherib at Lachishi in 701 B.C.E. and the Romans at Masada in 73 C.E., actually built sloping siege ramps in order to move their battering rams into position for attacking weak points in the fortification line, such as the city gate. So I doubt that these huge earthworks were intended to counter the use of battering rams; they might have even aided in their use.

Archaeologists Peter Parr and G. R. H. Wright have proposed a more banal function for the sloping ramparts: to counter erosion of the tell, or artificial hill, formed by superimposed layers of settlement. The tell of some cities reached a considerable artificial height by the second millennium B.C.E. But surely, there must have been more energy-efficient and less costly ways of countering erosion than by installing tons and tons of earthen embankments around the site.

I would like to propose another solution. I agree with Yadin that the MB II ramparts were a defense against siege warfare. But these thick sloping embankments, often surrounded by a ditch or dry moat, were designed, not to counter battering rams; rather they were built in response to another very ancient city-conquering technique—tunneling, mining and sapping—in common use even in the medieval period, in fact right up to the invention of gunpowder.

While the city was under siege, a team of excavators from the attacking army would begin their tunnel at some distance from the fortification line they wished to undermine. Their object was to cause the fortifications to collapse or to sneak beneath them and then to surface inside the city, usually at night, to launch a surprise attack. It might take days, even weeks, for the "moles" to reach their objective. Once under the fortifications they might widen the tunnel in order to collapse the defenseworks above, or if that failed, to stoke the widened tunnel with combustibles, which would then be burned in order to precipitate collapse, while assault troops penetrated the breach above ground.

Obviously, the thick earthen ramparts of Ashkelon and many other Canaanite cities posed a serious obstacle to this siege technique. The amount of debris the tunnelers would have had to remove before reaching the wall line and towers was so great that this would give scouting parties, sent out by the besieged city, adequate time to spot the sappers and trap them or smoke them out. The ditch which surrounded many such ramparts was, whenever possible, dug to bedrock. This prevented the sappers from beginning their tunnel beyond the ditch and would give the scouts of the besieged city a better chance at spotting the entrance to a tunnel.

Tunneling through an MB II rampart was not only slow but also quite dangerous: The sand and soil fills, such as were used at Ashkelon, would have been extremely unstable. The tunnels would have been extremely susceptible to collapse (we know from experience just how unstable the balks or standing sections are at Ashkelon after more than one collapse).

When I presented this hypothesis to the premier military historian of the ancient Near East, Professor Israel Ephal of the Hebrew University, he was quick to accept the idea and then informed me that there was even an Akkadian word, pilsûu, that describes just such a siege

technique, and it was already in common use by the early second millennium B.C.E. Thus the sapping or tunneling technique was known and used precisely at the time we find massive fortifications appearing in Syria and Canaan.

My conclusion is that the construction of immense sloping structures at the base of the city wall was not introduced by the Hyksos as foreign invaders. Indeed, the “Hyksos” were really Canaanites, anyway, as we now know from Manfred Bietak’s excavations at Tell-ed-Dab‘a, the Hyksos capital of Avaris in the Egyptian Delta. This fortification technique was an indigenous innovation of Canaanite cities to counter the besiegers’ tactic of tunneling to undermine the battlements or to enter the city clandestinely.

Jerusalem's Stepped-Stone Structure

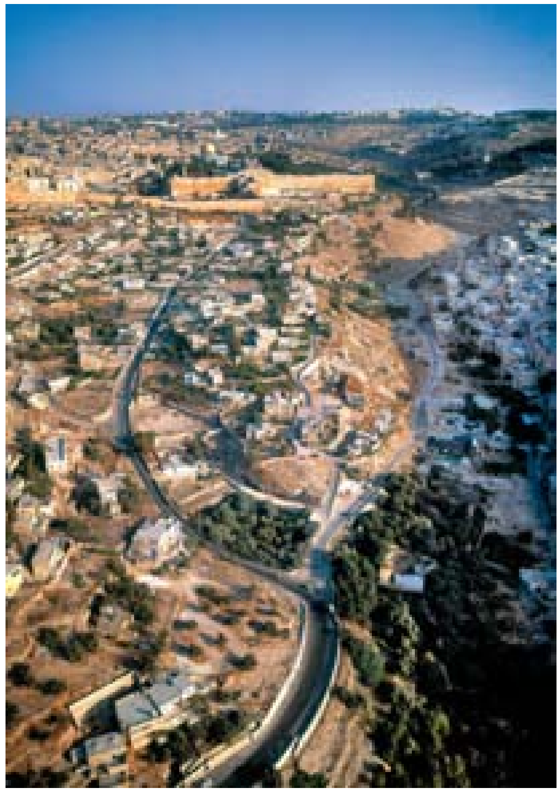
Jerusalem in David and Solomon's Time

By Jane Cahill West



Zev Radovan

The massive Stepped-Stone Structure uncovered in Jerusalem's City of David functioned as the foundational support for a monumental Iron Age building, perhaps King David's palace. As the largest Iron Age structure in Israel, it also stands at the center of the current debate about the nature of early Jerusalem.



Duby Tal/Albatross/J.D. Bartell

David and Solomon's Jerusalem, still known as the City of David, is the oldest part of the city. It extends south from Jerusalem's walled Old City. In the accompanying article, author Jane Cahill West argues that archaeological remains bear evidence that Jerusalem was a major city in the tenth century B.C.E., the age of David and Solomon.

Among the most controversial issues in both Biblical archaeology and Biblical studies is the nature of Jerusalem in the tenth century B.C.E. Why the tenth century? Because in the Bible that is the time of Israel's glory, the time of King David and King Solomon, the time of the United Kingdom of Judah and Israel.

The archaeological period just before that (what scholars call Iron Age I) is also important because—again according to the Bible—that is the Jerusalem that King David conquered after ruling in Hebron for seven years. What Jerusalem was like in Iron Age I is just as controversial as what it was like in the tenth century (the earliest phase of Iron Age II).

Jerusalem may be the most excavated city in the world. The article on Jerusalem in the Israel Exploration Society's *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (*NEAEHL*) lists 126 major excavations between 1853 and 1992. Since then, several other major excavations have revealed a wealth of new material.

But very little has been uncovered from Iron Age I (12th–11th centuries B.C.E.) or the earliest phase of Iron Age II (tenth century B.C.E.).

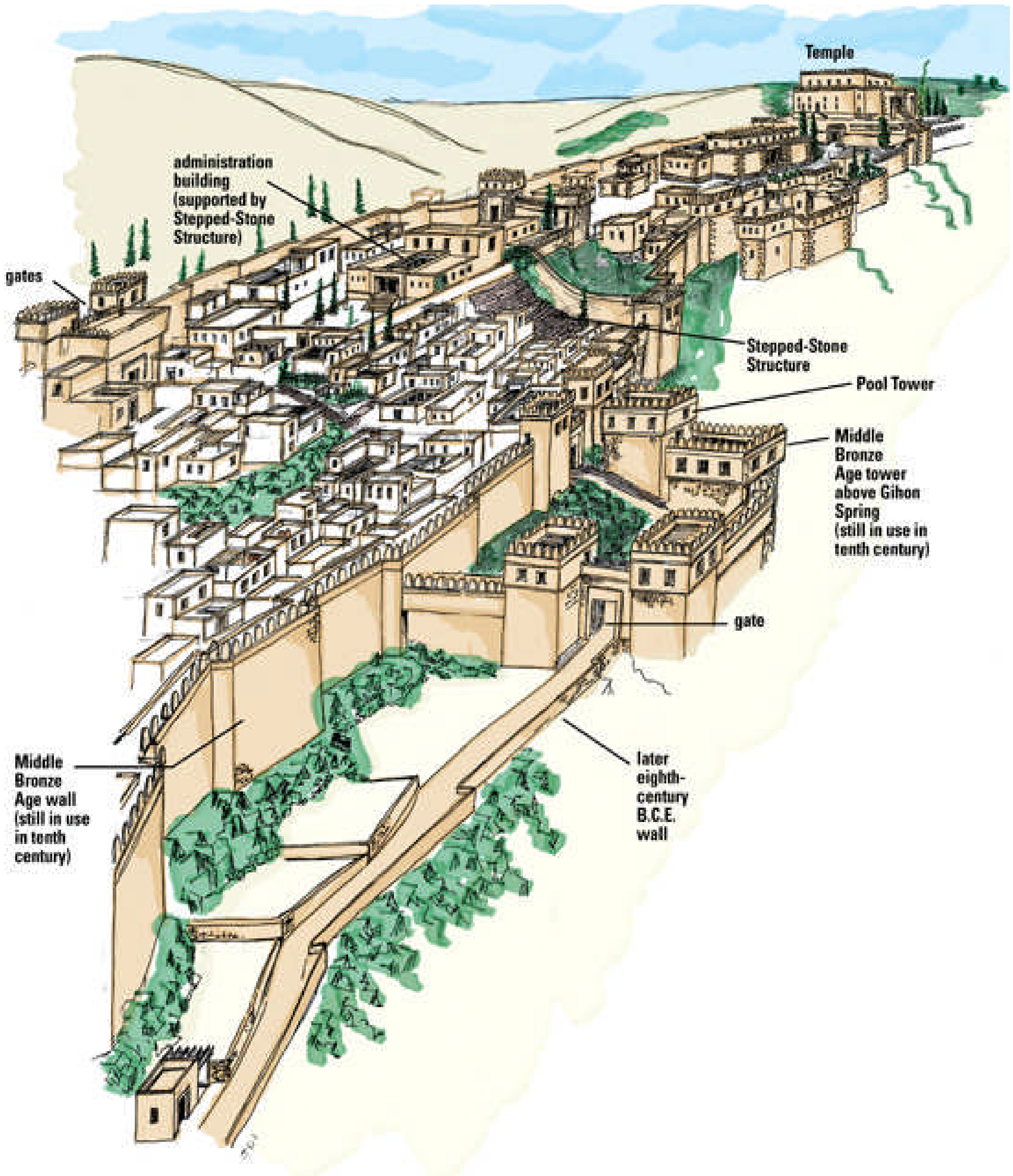
What has in fact been found? And what are the justifiable implications from what has *not* been found?

Our discussion will be confined to archaeology. We will talk a lot about the affirmative evidence, as well as what we can conclude from the absence of evidence. Both topics are hotly debated. For example, a leading Israeli archaeologist, David Ussishkin, maintains that after more than 150 years of intense archaeological excavation, Jerusalem has failed to produce any evidence of an occupational stratum, a fortification wall or even pottery from the period of the United Monarchy. Said Ussishkin: “I am afraid that evidence regarding the magnificent Solomonic capital was not discovered because it is nonexistent, not because it is still hidden in the ground.”[1]

My own view is that the archaeological evidence demonstrates that during the time of Israel’s United Monarchy, Jerusalem was fortified, was served by two complex water-supply systems and was populated by a socially stratified society that constructed at least two new residential quarters—one located inside and the other located outside the city’s fortification wall.

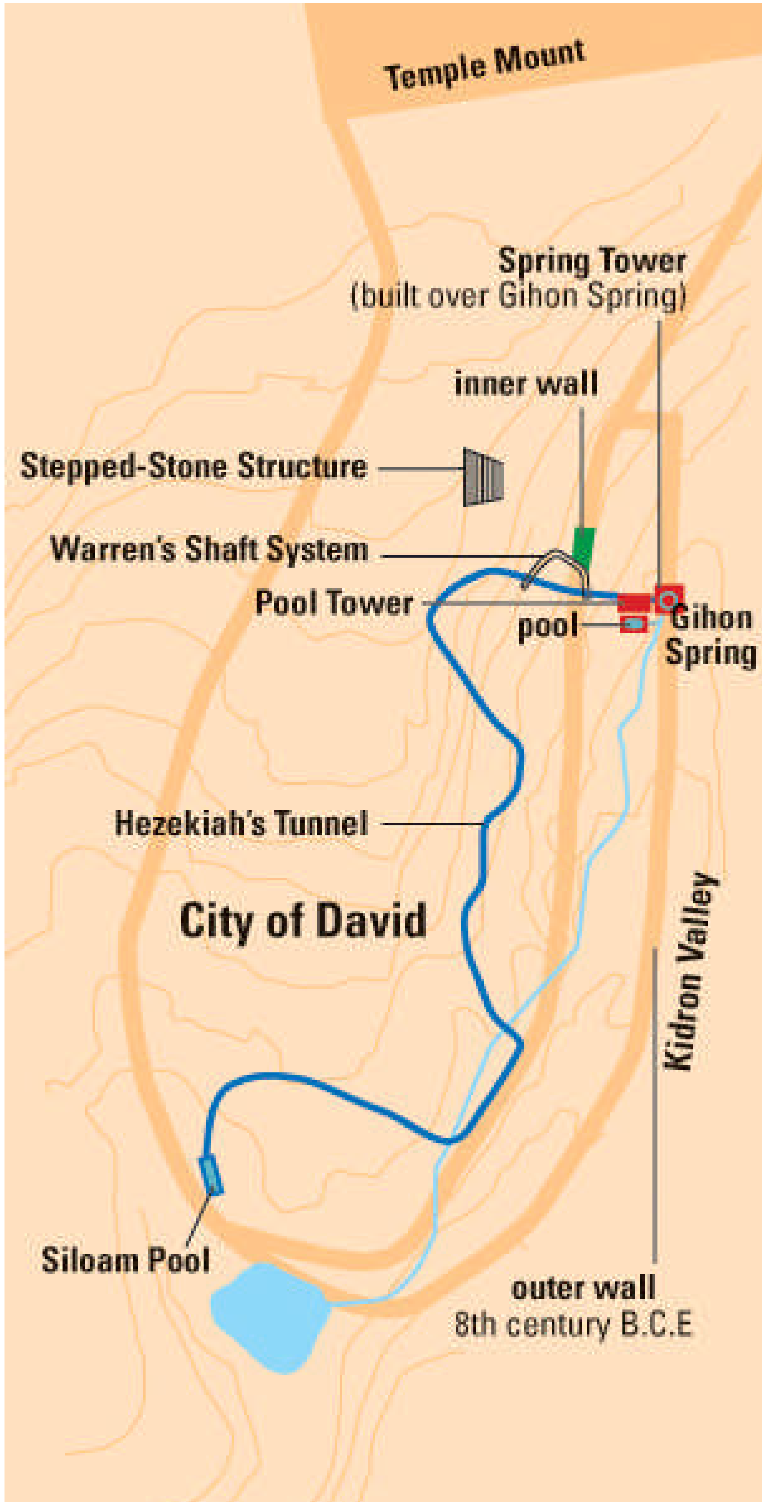
Equally important are the reasons for the supposed lack of affirmative evidence. Why is there so little?

One thing on which all scholars agree: In the time of David Jerusalem was confined to what is still called the City of David; that is, to a spur stretching south of the Temple Mount and bounded on the east by the Kidron Valley and, on the west and south, by the valley known in Roman times as the Tyropoeon, or Cheesemakers’s Valley.

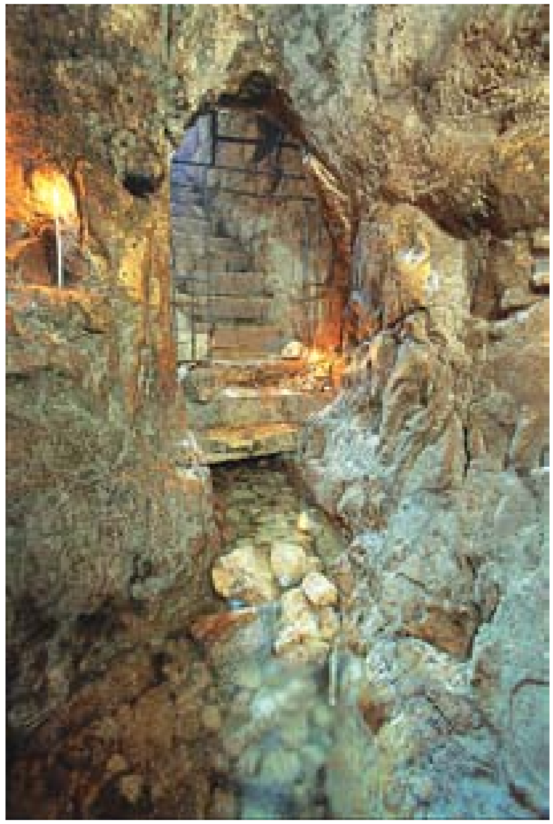


J.D. Bartell

An artist's reconstruction of the City of David in Solomon's time.



Jerusalem's prominence during the Iron Age was probably due, at least in part, to its position guarding the northern end of a bottleneck on the north-south route that followed the watershed line through the center of the country.

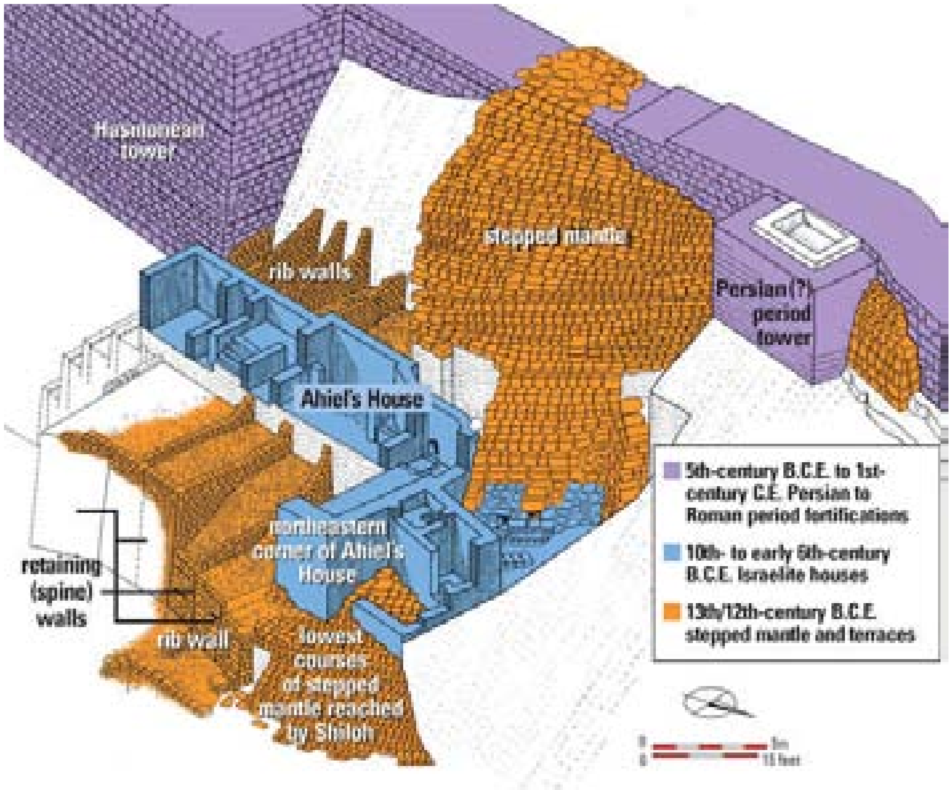


Garo Nalbandian

The all-important Gihon Spring served as ancient Jerusalem's water source.

On the eastern slope of the City of David, near the floor of the Kidron Valley, is Jerusalem's only perennial source of water, the Gihon Spring. Although the spring debouches into a cave located about 30 feet below the modern ground surface, in antiquity that cave opened onto the eastern slope of the hill well above the valley floor.

The most imposing surviving monument in the City of David is a complicated edifice known as the Stepped-Stone Structure, on the northeast slope of the site. The Stepped-Stone Structure is so massive that it could only have been supported by the fortification wall located near the middle of the City of David's eastern slope. (More about this fortification wall later.) It consists of a substructure and a superstructure. The substructure is composed of a series of interlocking terraces bounded by north-south spine walls and closely spaced east-west rib walls. Together, the "spine" and "rib" walls created a series of stepped, terrace-like compartments. These compartments were filled first with a layer of loosely packed boulders and then, above the boulders, with compacted soil. On top of the stone- and soil-filled compartments was the superstructure. The superstructure, reaching the equivalent of a 12-story building (10 feet per story), consisted of a rubble core and a mantle of roughly dressed limestone boulders laid in stepped courses rising from east to west.



City of David Society/Drawing by Leen Ritmeyer

Cahill contends that the massive Stepped-Stone Structure's rib-and-spine walls substructure and the stepped-mantle superstructure are a single architectural unit that dates to the transitional period between the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age (13th-12th century B.C.E.), the time just prior to David's capture of the city. It is proof, she argues, of Jerusalem's significance at the time of David's conquest and thereafter.

Parts of the Stepped-Stone Structure have been excavated by three expeditions directed by prominent archaeologists: the Irish-American team of R.A.S. Macalister and J. Garrow Duncan (1923–1925); British archaeologist Dame Kathleen Kenyon (1961–1967); and Israeli archaeologist Yigal Shiloh (1978–1985). It is generally agreed that the Stepped-Stone Structure supported a major complex at the top of the hill—a fortress, administrative complex, palace or public structure of comparable importance.

The dating of this complex structure is nothing if not contentious. Both Kenyon and Shiloh regarded the substructural terraces and the superstructural mantle as separate free-standing architectural units. They dated the substructural terraces to the 14th-13th century B.C.E. (the Late Bronze Age). Kenyon dated the uppermost courses of the superstructural mantle discovered by Macalister and Duncan to the second century B.C.E. (Hellenistic period); one part of the stepped mantle courses that she discovered to the tenth century B.C.E., the time of the United Monarchy; and another part that she discovered to the end of the eighth century B.C.E., the time of the

Judahite king Hezekiah. Shiloh discovered that all the various parts of the stepped mantle belonged to a single structure that he dated to the tenth century B.C.E.

Both Kenyon and Shiloh died without completing their final reports. Kenyon's archaeological heir responsible for publishing the final report on this part of her excavation is Dutch archaeologist Margreet Steiner. I serve that same function with respect to Shiloh's excavation.

Steiner, like Kenyon and Shiloh before her, has concluded that the substructural terraces and the superstructural mantle are separate, independent architectural elements. However, Steiner dates the substructural terraces somewhat later than Kenyon and Shiloh—to the 12th century B.C.E. (the beginning of Iron Age I). She dates the stepped superstructural mantle to the tenth century (the United Monarchy, i.e., beginning of Iron Age IIA).[a]

My own view is different. From my experience supervising the excavation of the Stepped-Stone Structure under Shiloh's direction and from a careful and detailed examination of Shiloh's excavation records—and as much of Kenyon's material as has been published—I am firmly convinced that the substructural terraces and the stepped mantle were built at the same time.

The evidence for this comes from a vertical section and a rectangular probe that Shiloh dug into the Stepped-Stone Structure. Both the section and the probe yielded architectural evidence demonstrating that the stepped mantle of the superstructure and the substructural terraces were built together as a single architectural unit. The rectangular probe (about 8 by 13 feet), revealed that the stepped mantle capped and sealed the superstructure's rubble core, which, in turn, capped and sealed the substructural terraces below. Moreover, in this rectangular probe, the rubble core immediately below the mantle was bonded—that is structurally integrated—with a stone fill retained by one of the spine walls that enclosed one of the substructural terraces. The vertical section revealed the same stratigraphic sequence of architectural elements, from the top down: stepped mantle, rubble core, soil- and stone-filled compartments.

There is also ceramic evidence that the Stepped-Stone Structure's substructural terraces and superstructural mantle are one architectural unit, built at the same time. Shiloh's excavation produced approximately 500 potsherds from the Stepped-Stone Structure, including roughly 100 potsherds from the substructural stone fills, 350 potsherds from the substructural soil fills and 50 potsherds from the rubble core. The composition and character of these ceramic assemblages

are identical. The latest of these potsherds date to the transition between the Late Bronze Age II and the Iron Age I, about the 13th-12th century B.C.E.

While the evidence is complicated, technical and controversial—and it has only been briefly described here—I am confident that the analysis I have presented in more detail elsewhere is correct.[2] The mantle of the Stepped-Stone Structure, its rubble core and the interlocking substructural terraces must have been contemporary and must be identified as component parts of a single structure during the transition from the Late Bronze to the Iron Age (13th-12th century B.C.E.). That such extraordinary architectural phenomena would be preserved within similar boundaries, contain identical pottery and yet represent the remains of two distinct structures separated in time by three to four centuries, as advocated by Kenyon and Shiloh (and to a lesser extent, by Steiner as well), seems very unlikely.

The size and complexity of this monumental structure indicates that it was an integral part of the city's fortification system. It probably skirted and supported a fortress or citadel that housed the pre-Davidic city's administrative-religious complex at the highest point of the town.

Because the pottery recovered from inside the Stepped-Stone Structure's internal fills indicates that it was built during the transition from the Late Bronze to the Iron Age it is difficult to understand Tel Aviv University archaeologist Israel Finkelstein's contention that, although there are indications of habitation in Jerusalem in Iron Age I, there are "almost no signs of monumental building operations."[3] Although almost 200 years appear to have passed before Jerusalem was captured by the Israelites under David, the construction of the monumental Stepped-Stone Structure at the dawn of the Iron Age set the stage for Jerusalem's future development as capital of the United Monarchy.

Setting aside other evidence for pre-Davidic Jerusalem, the question to ask is: What are the implications of such a huge complex fortress housing the city's administrative-religious institutions? What architects and laborers and stratified social and economic society were required to construct such a daunting architectural masterpiece? Does it make sense to say that in the period that immediately preceded David's conquest Jerusalem was hardly there?

If I may be allowed to mention the Bible, the Stepped-Stone Structure seems to me an excellent candidate for the Fortress of Zion (*Mestudat Tsion*) that we are told defended the city before David captured it (2 Samuel 5:7). Its imposing presence on the eastern slope may well have inspired Jerusalem's residents to taunt David and his men that they would not enter the city

without first removing the blind and the lame because the city was so well fortified that only someone capable of curing the blind and the lame could breach its defenses.

In recent years some scholars have challenged both the existence of the kings of the United Monarchy as historical figures and the ascription of *any* archaeological remains in Jerusalem to the period of their rule. Doubts as to the existence of David and his progeny as historic figures, however, have now been dispelled by discovery of the Tel Dan inscription mentioning the “House [Dynasty] of David” (*Beth David*), a bare 150 years or so after the monarch’s death.[b]

As for the archaeological remains of the United Monarchy, fragmentary and largely unpublished stratigraphic evidence demonstrates the uninterrupted occupation of Jerusalem from the Iron Age I to the early Iron Age II (c. 12th/11th–tenth/ninth centuries B.C.E.). This evidence came to light in almost every area excavated by Shiloh on the City of David’s eastern slope.

These periods of Jerusalem’s history are associated with three stratigraphic phases (Strata 15, 14 and 13) attributed to the 12th/11th, tenth and ninth centuries B.C.E. The remains of these three phases show a secure period during which the city prospered and outgrew its previous boundaries.



City of David Society

The Burnt Room House, so-named because one room was severely burned during the Babylonian destruction of 586 B.C.E. Other areas of the house bear evidence of the nature of tenth-century B.C.E. Jerusalem. Both this house and others adjacent to it were built when parts of the Stepped-Stone Structure were removed to make room for a new residential quarter. Beneath the floor were several strata, including one, Stratum 14, that dates to the early years of the United Monarchy—strong evidence, Cahill maintains, that Jerusalem was a flourishing city soon after the reign of King David.

The Iron Age I period (12th/11th century B.C.E.—Stratum 15) is represented by the already described Stepped-Stone Structure. Beginning in early Iron Age II (tenth century B.C.E.—Stratum 14) part of the Stepped-Stone Structure was removed and houses were built on and into it to accommodate an expanding city. Shiloh extensively excavated two of these houses—Ahiel's House (so-named because of an inscription found in the house) and the Burnt Room House (so named because the only one of its rooms completely cleared was severely burned during the Babylonian destruction of 586 B.C.E.). Each of these houses exhibited more than one phase of occupation, shown by multiple floors laid one atop another. The earliest in both cases was the floor of Stratum 14—from the time of the United Monarchy. The pottery assemblage from the Stratum 14 floor cleared in the Burnt Room House includes an imported Cypro-Phoenician bichrome flask that clearly dates to the earliest phase of Iron Age II. In addition, there was a substantial amount of local pottery traditionally dated to the tenth century B.C.E. (Although Israel Finkelstein, arguing for a minimalist position, might date this pottery to the ninth century B.C.E., the assemblage is closely comparable to the pottery assemblage from Stratum 12 at Arad, which all scholars—including Israel Finkelstein—agree dates to the tenth century B.C.E.)



A bearded man, with his hands apparently tied in front of him, dates to the tenth to ninth century B.C.E. and was discovered by archaeologist Yigal Shiloh during his excavation of the City of David. The object may have adorned a ceramic cult stand and was found with other items from the period, including a bronze fist, perhaps that of a god.

Zev Radovan

Built on and into the Stepped-Stone Structure, which was so massive that it could only have been supported by the city's fortification wall, the House of Ahiel and the Burnt Room House belonged to a residential quarter newly constructed inside the walled area of the city. They were built of partly dressed limestone boulders some of which were 2.5 feet long. The eastern wall of

each house was more than 3 feet thick. Contemporaneously, a second residential quarter was constructed outside the fortification wall. However, walls in the houses built in the extramural quarter were thin (only 1.5 feet thick) and made of small undressed fieldstones.[4] The pottery from these houses consisted mainly of kitchenware and did not include any imported vessels. The differences noted between the houses built inside the fortification wall and those constructed outside the fortification wall suggest that structures in the extramural quarter served as dwellings for Jerusalem's less-affluent residents.[5] These differences suggest, in turn, a stratified society of the early Iron Age II (the time of the United Monarchy) not previously evident in Jerusalem's archaeological record. The construction of both these residential quarters in the earliest phase of Iron Age II demonstrate that during the tenth century B.C.E. the city spread beyond the boundaries established by its preexisting fortification walls.

Moreover, the disfigurement of the Stepped-Stone Structure to accommodate houses like Ahiel's House and the Burnt Room House and the development of a new residential quarter outside the city's fortification wall suggest developmental pressures caused by a growing population and a shift in the city's security requirements, pressures that appear to have been stimulated by an increasingly stable environment during the United Monarchy.

Construction of the House of Ahiel and the Burnt Room House on top of the Stepped-Stone Structure appears to have been possible due to the expansion or relocation of the city's new administrative-religious center to what we know today as the Temple Mount, north of the City of David. The focal point of the city would then have been the new Temple, adjoined by a precinct of royal and administrative buildings, none of which have been discovered, at least arguably because the Temple Mount is strictly off limits to archaeologists.

The most frequently voiced argument by those who challenge the historical existence of the United Monarchy is a supposed lack of archaeological evidence. In most cases these arguments are either grossly misleading, illogical, disingenuous or all three. Virtually every archaeologist to have excavated in the City of David has found architecture and artifacts dating to the period of the United Monarchy.

But the argument of the naysayers is not confined to the period of the United Monarchy (early Iron Age II) or even to the period immediately before that (Iron Age I). They contrast the so-called meager remains from these periods with the relatively extensive remains from later in the Iron Age II period (eighth–sixth centuries B.C.E.). The reason for this admitted disparity requires an understanding of ancient site formation in the central hillcountry of Israel. As in other sites in this area, buildings in Jerusalem have traditionally been constructed of stone rather than brick. Jerusalem's builders have therefore excavated to bedrock to secure both firm foundations and

building stones. As observed by Shiloh, these building practices have prevented the accumulation of superimposed archaeological strata characteristic of Israel's tells:

> The continuity of accumulation of the strata in the various excavational [sic] areas was not uniform. The builders in each stratum sought to found their structures directly on bedrock, and thus often they damaged earlier strata, which occasionally were even destroyed altogether. For this reason, Strata 12–10 [eighth–sixth centuries B.C.E.] were especially [well] preserved, for they are the last major construction strata on the eastern slope.[6]

Moreover, on the summit of the ridge we call the City of David, Roman and Byzantine quarrying has caused irreparable damage to the archaeological record. In the words of Kathleen Kenyon:

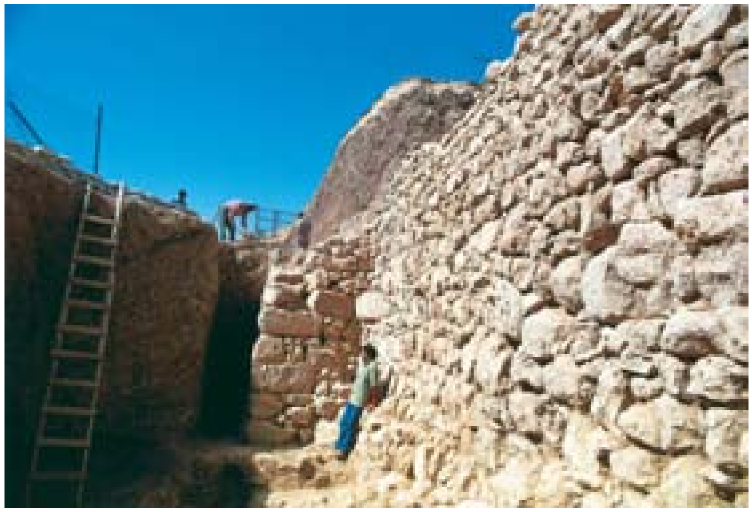
> Evidence of early occupation on the summit area of the [City of David] does not exist. This lacuna is mainly because Roman quarrying and Byzantine buildings have destroyed all earlier structures and earlier occupation. For all we know, the original height of the eastern ridge [i.e., City of David] may have been appreciably above that of the surviving rock.[7]

Thus, the best-preserved structures in Jerusalem are those most recently constructed, with earlier remains preserved only when exploited or avoided by later builders.

The extensive remains from later in Iron Age II (which ended with the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E.) on the eastern slope of the City of David were preserved only because they are the remains of the last buildings constructed in the area before modern times.[8] When the exiles returned from the Babylonian Exile, they built their city wall higher up the slope, near the top of the ridge.

The naysayers have an answer to this, however: How come, they ask, we have such monumental remains from the Middle Bronze Age (18th–17th centuries B.C.E.)?

The Middle Bronze Age remains in the City of David have emerged most dramatically in the recent excavations of Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron.[c] Even before that, however, we knew of a massive fortification wall built above a steep scarp in the middle of the eastern slope of the City of David. Both Kenyon and Shiloh exposed parts of it. It is built of enormous stones and is over six feet wide.



Hershel Shanks

How could they miss it? The major city wall shown here, with archaeologist Eli Shukron standing at left, was built by King Hezekiah in the eighth century B.C.E. as part of a fortification to protect the Gihon Spring and an expanded Jerusalem. The wall was only recently discovered in the renewed excavations of Reich and Shukron, demonstrating the dangers of reaching conclusions based on negative evidence.

During salvage excavations recently conducted in the vicinity of the Gihon Spring, Reich and Shukron uncovered remains of two possibly free-standing towers also built during the Middle Bronze Age from cyclopean stones, some of which are more than 6 feet long. According to Reich and Shukron, these towers guarded both the entrance to the Gihon Spring and a pool from which its water could be drawn.

In the course of their excavation, Reich and Shukron were able to redate to the Middle Bronze Age two other long-known features of the City of David—what scholars call Channel II, as numbered in the early 20th century by Father Louis-Hugues Vincent who studied the city's complicated water system, and parts of the Warren's Shaft water system.

Channel II is a long channel, sometimes open, sometimes covered, extending down the entire eastern side of the City of David, carrying the water of the Gihon Spring to a pool at the southern end of the city and on the way irrigating terraced fields located on the slopes of the adjacent Kidron Valley. In excavating the towers adjacent the Gihon Spring, Reich and Shukron discovered that beneath the huge stones of one tower lay the beginning of Channel II; that is, the construction of Channel II preceded the construction of the towers guarding the Gihon Spring. In other words, Channel II, with its fine stone construction, dates at least to the Middle Bronze Age.

The Warren's Shaft water system consists of a long tunnel that leads from inside the city to a chimney-like shaft, which for more than a hundred years was thought to have been used to

draw water directed to its base by a channel leading from the Gihon Spring. Reich and Shukron have shown, however, that the long tunnel leading to the shaft was dug in two phases, and that only in the second was the natural karstic sinkhole known as Warren's Shaft accidentally discovered. In the first phase, which Reich and Shukron have shown dates to the Middle Bronze Age, the tunnel extended beyond the location of Warren's Shaft to a pool that collected the waters of the spring.

The argument is that these finds demonstrate that architecture far older than the United Monarchy (and the immediately preceding Iron Age I period) has copiously survived, only emphasizing the lack of these kinds of remains in the later periods of the United Monarchy (and the immediately preceding Iron Age I period). In other words, if more hasn't been found from these later periods, it is because it was never there—so the argument runs.

These Middle Bronze Age features were preserved, however, only because they continued to be used right down to the end of the eighth century B.C.E. and possibly even until the Babylonian destruction of 586 B.C.E.

This assertion takes some explanation: It is agreed by everyone that in the eighth century B.C.E. a new fortification wall—in places possibly even a double fortification wall—was built to protect the city. It is also universally agreed that Hezekiah's Tunnel, which carried the water of the Gihon Spring to the western side of the city, was quarried at this time as a defensive measure, hiding the spring and its water from the Assyrian army that besieged Jerusalem during King Hezekiah's reign (Isaiah 22:11, 2 Chronicles 32:2–4).

Since it is also agreed that there was some habitation of the city between the Middle Bronze Age and the eighth century B.C.E., it is reasonable to conclude that the Middle Bronze Age water systems remained in use at least until Hezekiah's Tunnel was quarried.

Moreover, the massive Middle Bronze Age wall (built about 1800 B.C.E.) was also used until about the eighth century B.C.E., roughly a thousand years. The evidence comes from Kenyon's excavation, from Shiloh's excavation and from the recent excavations of Reich and Shukron. All three of these excavations found features from the eighth century B.C.E. (Iron Age II) integrated into features from the Middle Bronze Age.

Kenyon found Iron Age II extramural structures built right up to the outer face of the Middle Bronze Age fortification wall, indicating that that wall must have been there in Iron Age II.

Shiloh found that large sections of the Middle Bronze Age fortification wall were incorporated into the fortification wall built during Iron Age II.

Thus Kenyon and Shiloh independently concluded that the Middle Bronze Age fortification wall remained in use during Iron Age II.

And Reich and Shukron found at least one floor surface from the end of the Iron Age built up to the exterior wall of one of the Middle Bronze Age towers guarding the Gihon Spring. This is indisputable evidence that at least one of these towers remained standing until the end of Iron Age II, in the sixth century B.C.E.

In short, the Middle Bronze Age fortification wall and the Middle Bronze Age towers around the Gihon Spring remained standing and in use throughout the period of the United Monarchy until they were either superseded by later construction during Iron Age II or destroyed at the end of that period by the Babylonian army in 586 B.C.E.

It should hardly surprise us that these Middle Bronze Age features lasted a thousand or more years. Examples of structures that have remained in use for hundreds, if not thousands, of years abound in modern Jerusalem.

Look at the walls enclosing the Temple Mount, or look at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, or the Islamic monuments on the Temple Mount, or the walls of the Old City itself.

We need to contrast these impressive remains from the Middle Bronze Age with what isn't there from the Middle Bronze Age (more specifically, from Middle Bronze Age II). Aside from the fortifications and the remains of the water system, there is almost nothing: a few poorly preserved walls and beaten-earth floors found in proximity to the fortification wall, isolated occurrences of pottery sherds and a few burials. Imagine what the skeptics would say if this were all. They would confidently conclude that there was hardly a settlement here in Middle Bronze Age II—perhaps a few hardy people lived near the spring, but that's all.

Because of the preserved Middle Bronze Age II fortifications and water system, we know that the city must have been an important center at this time. We're still not sure how they moved the boulders and raised them up to build the towers around the Gihon Spring. But it wasn't done by a few country bumpkins living in a small isolated settlement. The very existence of these features implies a rather significant population and a rather complex social system with a sophisticated administrative regime of considerable economic strength.

Because of these features, most scholars conclude that, during the Middle Bronze Age, Jerusalem served as the capital of an urbanized city-state that dominated the southern part of the central hillcountry. Yet this conclusion is possible only because these features were preserved, and these features were preserved only because they continued to be used long after the Middle Bronze Age. (Even the few beaten-earth floors from the Middle Bronze Age were preserved only because they were built in dips and hollows in the bedrock that were subsequently bridged, and therefore sealed, by buttressing added to the fortification wall during later phases of the Middle Bronze Age—that is, after 1800 B.C.E.).

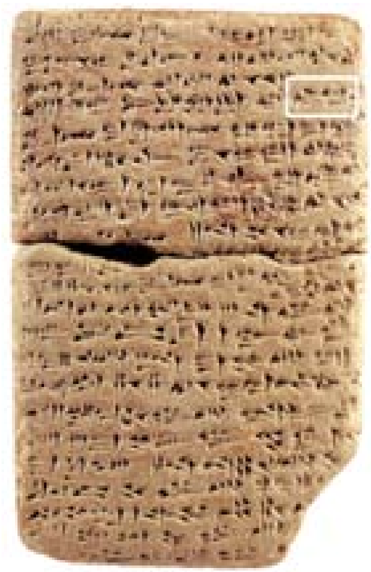
We must keep in mind another point about negative evidence. As is often said, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence—especially at a site such as Jerusalem, located in hilly terrain. Kenyon thought that after she finished excavating, there was nothing more to be discovered on the pile of rocks we call the eastern slope of the City of David. Yet along came Shiloh, who discovered that the various parts of the Stepped-Stone Structure, which Kenyon had dated to three different periods, all belonged to a single structure that he dated to the period of the United Monarchy. He also discovered that Warren's Shaft was not manmade but, instead, a natural karstic sink-hole, and that Jerusalem's earliest architecture did not date to the Middle Bronze Age but to the Early Bronze Age, a thousand years older than previously believed! Moreover, after Shiloh came Reich and Shukron, who discovered a second, and previously unknown, eighth-century B.C.E. wall; some Middle Bronze Age towers; a contemporaneous pool by the Gihon Spring; and clear evidence that Channel II and parts of the Warren's Shaft water system, both of which had previously been widely dated to the Iron Age, are actually a thousand years older! Who knows what future excavators will discover? Who knows what lies buried beneath modern structures that make excavation impossible now?

Just as the impressive, but limited, remains of the Middle Bronze Age imply an important urban center even in the absence of houses and large assemblages of pottery, so, too, the impressive, but limited, remains of the early Iron Age, as shown by the Stepped-Stone Structure, imply an important urban center even in the absence of houses and large assemblages of pottery.

Another kind of evidence demonstrates that Jerusalem was an important urban center in yet another period for which there is little archaeological evidence. I am speaking here about the so-called Amarna Age—the Late Bronze Age II period, the 14th century B.C.E., which ended with the collapse of the Egyptian empire. It is often called the Amarna Age because the political situation in the Late Bronze Age II is illuminated by a hoard of diplomatic correspondence, found at Tell el-Amarna, in Egypt, between two Egyptian pharaohs and a host of subservient rulers in

Egyptian-dominated Canaan. Six of the letters from a pharaoh are addressed to Abdi-Heba, the ruler of Jerusalem (called Urusalim in the cuneiform text of the tablets). These letters refer to the “Land of Jerusalem” and to its “towns.” The consensus of scholarly opinion is that during the Late Bronze Age, Jerusalem served as capital of an Egyptian vassal city-state the size and strength of which was comparable to other political entities in the region.[d]

Among the hoard of cuneiform tablets known as the Amarna Letters—correspondence from the royal archives of pharaohs Amenophis III and his son Akhenaten, who reigned during the 14th century B.C.E.—is this tablet, sent by Abdi-Heba, ruler of Jerusalem. That a ruler of Jerusalem was writing an official letter to an Egyptian pharaoh suggests that in the 14th century B.C.E. there was indeed a city at Jerusalem—referred to here as “Urusalim.”



Staatliche Museen zu Berlin-Preussicher Kulturbesitz Vorderasiatisches Museum

Archaeological evidence of the Amarna period in Jerusalem, however, is scant, although a number of stratified fragmentary structures containing Late Bronze Age pottery have been found on or near the bedrock. In addition, several tombs from this period have been found in surrounding hills. But that’s all. The fragmentary nature of these remains has led some scholars to conclude that Jerusalem was unoccupied or, at most, the site of an impoverished village during the Late Bronze Age II. This conclusion is grounded on the (now familiar) assertions that Jerusalem’s archaeological record has not produced monumental architecture from Late Bronze Age II like that from Middle Bronze Age II, as previously described. The lesson, however, is just the opposite: The Amarna letters demonstrate that Jerusalem served as one of several Egyptian-subservient Canaanite kingdoms, in which the king’s palace served as the administrative center of a kingdom that ruled the surrounding countryside and other smaller towns. Yet almost no archaeological evidence of this has been found.

Margreet Steiner attempts to meet this argument. Her first argument, now abandoned by her, was that Jerusalem was not what the Amarna tablets referred to as Urusalim. Urusalim was elsewhere, she argued. Her latest argument is that Amarna Age Jerusalem was nothing more

than a fortified baronial estate.[e] Her argument, however, finds little, if any, support in the Amarna letters themselves. The Amarna letters demonstrate that Late Bronze Age II Canaan was divided into a network of kingdoms of various sizes and strengths led by local dynastic rulers who passed on the throne to their sons. They were regarded both by their subjects and by the rulers of neighboring cities as kings. Although the letters contain few details about the internal structure of the kingdoms, they demonstrate that the king's palace served as the center of government and that the bureaucratic apparatus operated either in the palace or in its immediate vicinity. They demonstrate that the capital cities were surrounded by tracts of agricultural fields cultivated by the city's inhabitants and that the peripheral areas contained villages and hamlets each with its own fields and pasture lands. Jerusalem was no different. As noted earlier, Jerusalem is referred to in the Amarna letters as the "land of Jerusalem," which included "towns" in its domain. One letter refers to a "house" in which 50 Egyptian soldiers were garrisoned.

In short, although the archaeological evidence for Late Bronze Age II Jerusalem is sparse, we may be confident, based on the Amarna letters, that a city, significant for its time, existed then.

The most significant conclusion to be drawn from more than 150 years of intense archaeological excavations in Jerusalem is that we must be careful not to be beguiled by the so-called absence of evidence. There are good reasons why the archaeological evidence appears to be "so little." The archaeological evidence, properly understood, demonstrates that during the reigns of David and Solomon Jerusalem was a significant urban center.

Jerusalem’s Babylonian Siege Tower

Found in Jerusalem: Remains of the Babylonian Siege

By Suzanne F. Singer

Uncovered during excavations by Nahman Avigad in Jerusalem’s Jewish Quarter during the 1970s, this 22-foot tower helped defend the city against Babylonian invasion in 586 B.C.E.



Jewish Quarter Excavations/Hillel Geva and Avital Zitronblat

On the last day of his 1975 season Professor Nahman Avigad of Hebrew University, digging in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, discovered four arrowheads buried in ashes at the base of a massive stone defense tower. The tower was built by the Israelites more than 2600 years ago—before the Babylonian destruction of the city in 586 B.C.E. It had been constructed to protect Jerusalem’s vulnerable northern perimeter. The four arrowheads had fallen short of their mark, apparently hitting the outside wall of the tower. They came to rest in the ashes of the burning city—probably when soldiers of the Babylonian leader Nebuchadnezzar “came and burnt down the House of the Lord and the Royal palace and all the houses in Jerusalem … and the walls around Jerusalem were torn down …” (2 Kings 25:9–10).

The four arrowheads, one iron and three bronze, are thought to be the first remains ever recovered of the two-year Babylonian siege which finally broke the defenses of the starving city. (In the 1960s British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon found several Israelite homes on the Ophel which had been burned during the Babylonian destruction of the city.)

Three weeks after Professor Avigad’s remarkable discovery, I stood with the 70-year-old archaeologist beside one of the deep rectangular excavation pits on the edge of the Jewish Quarter. Since 1969, Professor Avigad has been digging in the Jewish Quarter for nine months of every year (an impressively long archaeological season). The once-densely populated Jewish Quarter had been almost totally destroyed by the Jordanians between 1948 and 1967. Ironically enough, this destruction provided archaeologists with an unexpected opportunity to dig below modern levels in an area of unusual historic interest. In Herodian times, this area was known as the “Upper City,” where the royal and the wealthy lived before the Romans destroyed the Second Temple in 70 C.E. Whether this area was occupied prior to the Herodian period was, until recent years, unclear. Archaeologists were unable to agree on when Solomon’s Jerusalem—confined to the eastern ridge and the hill of Ophel—became too restricted for an enlarged population, thereby forcing people to build their homes on the western ridge. Equally unanswerable was the question as to when the western ridge was finally included within the defensive walls surrounding the city. Professor Avigad’s excavations have now removed much of this uncertainty.



Archaeologist Nahman Avigad

In 1970 Professor Avigad unearthed the stone foundation of a wall—less than 150 feet from the Israelite tower he found in 1975. The foundation of the wall was 22 feet thick and obviously supported what was once the city wall. Avigad followed this wall base for 120 feet and was able to date it from the pottery associated with it to the latter part of the eighth century B.C.E. The wall base was built of large stones laid without bonding. The area of the wall which Avigad

excavated included a sharp angle. The archaeologists also observed that the wall cut through a pre-existing house of the same period. This led Avigad to conclude that the western ridge had first been settled as an unwalled area in the eighth century B.C.E., then in the latter part of that century, perhaps during the reign of Hezekiah, the western ridge was brought within the city's defensive boundaries by this wall.

As Professor Avigad stood on the rim of the excavation explaining his most recent discoveries in the careful, technical language of the professional archaeologist, he could not mask the pride and pleasure he took in his accomplishment. He had waited five years to dig at the spot where we stood, amid new buildings and ruins, overlooking the newly discovered tower in the northwest corner of the Jewish Quarter. It had been important to continue explorations here because of the proximity of the spot to the Israelite city wall he had discovered in 1970. But not until the shell of an old house was removed by the Jewish Quarter Reconstruction and Development Company was it possible to start working. The area opened for excavation was a square 28 feet on a side, bounded on the west by a ruined synagogue of the Moroccan community and on the east by a sheikh's tomb.

The first 10 feet of digging produced nothing but empty fill—accumulated refuse. Below this, the southern balk continued to reflect only fill, unsupported by masonry and threatening to fall on the crews working beneath it. In the north balk, a firm stone exterior wall of a Byzantine building appeared, which reduced the likelihood of collapse.

Bedrock was finally reached 45 feet below today's ground level. On the bedrock Professor Avigad found what he called "a bit of fortification" from the Hasmonean period (second or first century B.C.E.). This "bit of fortification" was dated in two ways: first, by the masonry which was characteristic of the period; second, portions of the walls were bonded to a surface on and, below which were found pottery sherds characteristic of the first and second centuries B.C.E.

Since this was all found on bedrock, one might be tempted to conclude that the earliest occupation of the area was in the Hasmonean period. However, high above what remains of the Hasmonean fortification walls stood the 22-foot-tall tower. And the Hasmonean fortification walls had been built against the tower. Therefore, the tower must have been built before the Hasmonean fortifications. Moreover, this tower was of a strikingly different style of construction, completely unlike the abutting Hasmonean walls. The Hasmonean fortification walls were built from well-cut, close fitting, rectangular stones with margins and bosses. The stones of the tower, looming above in the northwest corner, were large, rough-hewn boulders chinked between with small stones.

Iron arrowheads used during the siege of Jerusalem were buried in a layer of soot and ash surrounding the tower. The three-edged arrowhead at lower right is the bronze Scytho-Iranian type used by the Babylonian army.



Jewish Quarter Excavations/Hillel Geva and Avital Zitronblat

Avigad was able to date the mystery tower by using the same technique which had given him the date of the Hasmonean fortification. He removed part of the Hasmonean surface and about 3 feet below it found another surface of beaten earth, this one tightly bonded to the tower. On top of this surface in a layer of ashes were pottery sherds of the eighth and seventh century. In this ash layer Avigad also found the four arrowheads, one of which enabled him to pinpoint the date of the battle which occurred there. One of the arrowheads—in bronze—was of a Scythian type, widely used by archers, including Babylonian archers, after about 600 B.C.E. The Scythian type arrowhead was distinguished from the others by its three triangular fins and a hollow socket into which a shaft was inserted. It was always cast and in bronze. The Late Iron II pottery on the bonded surface of the Israelite tower indicated that a battle took place between 800 and 587 B.C.E.; but the Scythian type arrowhead, which could not be earlier than about 600 B.C., narrowed the range of possible dates of the battle to within a few years of the siege of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

Avigad next directed his team of diggers to remove the attached surface of beaten earth and excavate below—into the foundation trench of the tower. In this foundation trench was sealed materials which had been placed there when that part of the tower had been built. In the foundation trench, Avigad found more of the same type of eighth–seventh century Israelite pottery, unmixed with any later material. The evidence was conclusive that the tower which we were looking at had also been seen by “King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon [when he] and all his army marched upon Jerusalem and laid siege to it …” (2 Kings 25:1).

Avigad’s discovery of the Israelite tower, against which the Hasmoneans 500 years later built their own fortifications, helped resolve a dispute between some modern historians and the

first-century historian Josephus. In *The Jewish Wars* Josephus describes three walls which protected Jerusalem on the north from the Roman siege in 70 C.E. The first (innermost) or “old” defense wall which surrounded Jerusalem at the time was, according to Josephus, “almost impregnable”. He also says that “David and Solomon, and later kings, too … tackled the work (of constructing this wall) with enthusiasm.” Some historians have assumed that Josephus exaggerated the antiquity of the first wall and that in fact the wall which he described was built by the Hasmoneans only about 200 years before his time. From the great height of the Israelite tower still extant today it is obvious that in Josephus’s time the tower was a dramatically visible structure. As a result of Professor Avigad’s excavation, we know the tower which must have been part of a defense wall was built in about the eighth century B.C.E., during the Judahite monarchy. Thus, although Josephus may have exaggerated somewhat when he called the wall of which the tower was a part Davidic, his exaggeration regarding the Israelite tower was by no more than about 250 years. (David ruled from approximately 1000 to 960 B.C.E.)

The location of the wall discovered in 1970 so near to the line described by Josephus as stretching from Hippicus (near today’s Jaffa Gate) to the west colonnade of the Temple, is additional confirmation that Josephus’s account is reliable as an eyewitness observation.

Next season Professor Avigad plans to follow the line of the Israelite tower to the west by continuing to dig in front of the Moroccan synagogue now being restored. Although he cautiously refrains from speculating about what he may find, it is probable that further digging to the north will show that the Israelite city-wall foundation found in 1970 was originally linked to the massive tower which Avigad found in 1975.

The Authors

James Brashler ("Nag Hammadi Codices Shed New Light on Early Christian History") is professor emeritus of Bible at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. As a Ph.D. student, he spent nearly 15 years translating and studying the manuscripts from Nag Hammadi.

Jane Cahill West ("Jerusalem in David and Solomon's Time") served as senior staff archaeologist for the Hebrew University's City of David Archaeological Project directed by Yigal Shiloh from 1978 to 1985. She is publishing the pottery from the Stepped-Stone Structure.

Ze'ev Meshel ("Did Yahweh Have a Consort?") is senior lecturer in archaeology at Tel Aviv University, where he has worked since 1975. He led the excavation of the well-known desert site of Kuntillet 'Ajrud and is an expert in the archaeology of the Sinai Peninsula.

John Monson ("The New 'Ain Dara Temple") is associate professor of Old Testament and Semitic languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. His archaeological fieldwork has taken him to Syria, Lebanon and numerous excavations in Israel.

Hershel Shanks ("The Siloam Pool" and "Has the House Where Jesus Stayed in Capernaum Been Found?") is founder and editor of **BAR**. He has written numerous books on the Bible and Biblical archaeology, including *Jerusalem's Temple Mount* (Continuum, 2007) and *Jerusalem: An Archaeological Biography* (Random House, 1995).

Suzanne F. Singer ("Found in Jerusalem: Remains of the Babylonian Siege") is a contributing editor of the Biblical Archaeology Society. She has written numerous articles for **BAR**, as well as for **BAR**'s earlier sister magazines, *Bible Review* and *Archaeology Odyssey*.

Lawrence E. Stager ("When Canaanites and Philistines Ruled Ashkelon") is Dorot Professor of the Archaeology of Israel at Harvard University. Since 1985, he has led the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon, one of Israel's largest and most important coastal sites.

James F. Strange ("Has the House Where Jesus Stayed in Capernaum Been Found?") is distinguished university professor in the department of religious studies and executive director of the Interdisciplinary Center for Hellenic Studies at the University of South Florida in Tampa. He has excavated at numerous sites in Israel, including Sepphoris in the Galilee.

Notes

Nag Hammadi Codices Shed New Light on Early Christian History

Endotes (numbered)

1. Coptic refers to the language and culture of Christians in Egypt from approximately the second century C.E. until today. Coptic is the final stage in the development of the ancient Egyptian language; Coptic is written in the Greek alphabet and incorporates many Greek words. Before its use as a popular language gradually died out after the Moslem conquest of Egypt in the seventh century, Coptic was the language of a rich but little-known literary and liturgical corpus of which the Nag Hammadi manuscripts are one of the best-known representatives.

Gnostic (pronounced "nostik") refers to the beliefs and practices of a variety of religious groups that relied on secret knowledge revealed only to a select few. (Gnosis is the Greek word for this non-empirical insight.) Gnostic teachers frequently combined spiritual wisdom from several sources and traditions, including Christian, Jewish, Greco-Roman, Egyptian, or Iranian thought, into syncretistic systems reserved for their own devotees. In these systems, physical and historical ways of understanding reality and human experience were rejected in favor of spiritual and mystical modes of understanding. Some scholars reserve the term "Gnostic" for the developed systems of heretical Christian teachers of the second century C.E. such as Basilides and Valentinus. Others use the term "gnosis" (note the lower case "g") as a general term. It is important to remember that "Gnostic" does not always mean "heretical," since the definition of orthodoxy was an ongoing process that was not complete when Gnostic ideas and practices flourished.

2. *Codex* (plural *codices*) is the Latin word for "book." In English it has come to refer to handmade books, of which the Nag Hammadi codices are among the oldest surviving examples.

3. Page references are to the hardcover edition of *The Gnostic Gospels*.

4. In the scholarly literature devoted to the study of the Nag Hammadi codices, a system using Roman numerals for each codex followed by an Arabic number in italics for the tractate within that codex is generally accepted. Most scholars add the page and line number of the original Coptic manuscript after the codex and tractate reference, while others omit the tractate reference at times. Thus II,*1*: 11, 18–22 is a reference to lines 18–22 on page 11 in the first tractate of Nag Hammadi Codex II. This tractate is known as the Apocryphon of John.

5. Her use of the term "Gospels" both in the title of her book and the text itself is only partially justified by the use of Gnostic writings such as The Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Philip, The Gospel of the Egyptians (once mistakenly referred to as the Gospel to the Egyptians), and The Gospel of Truth. She uses the other Gnostic writings and even the writings of the Church Fathers more than she uses the Gnostic Gospels. Her publishers may have had something to do with the provocative use of the term "Gnostic Gospels" in the title of the book.

The New 'Ain Dara Temple: Closest Solomonic Parallel

Endnotes (numbered)

1. Portions of this article have been adapted from "The Temples of 'Ain Dara and Jerusalem," *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion*, eds. Gary Beckman and Theodore Lewis (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, forthcoming). I would like to thank Anthony Appa for sharing with me his pictures of 'Ain Dara and his experiences at the site. I am indebted to my mentor, Lawrence E. Stager, for many helpful comments.

2. Ali Abu Assaf, *Der Tempel von 'Ain Dara*, Damaszener Forschungen 3 (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1990).

3. Some scholars believe that the Jerusalem Temple was also built in several phases, one of which was the ambulatory; see D.W. Gooding, "An Impossible Shrine," *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 15 (1965), pp. 405–420.

4. These other sites are Carchemish, Zinjirli and other Neo-Hittite sites (see Abu Assaf, '*Ain Dara*, pp. 39–41). See more recently Abu Assaf, "Die Kleinfunde aus "'An Dara," *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 9 (1996), pp. 47–111.

5. Here and throughout the temple reliefs we find the "serpentine curve" pattern known from other finds in the Levant, including a basalt bowl from Hazor Temple H (see Yigael Yadin, *Hazor* III–IV [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961], pl. 122) and

most recently a tenth-century pottery vessel from Tel Rehov (see Amihai Mazar and John Camp, "Will Tel Rehov Save the United Monarchy?" **BAR** 26:02).

6. Lawrence E. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 260 (1985), pp. 1–35; and "The Song of Deborah: Why Some Tribes Answered the Call and Others Did Not," **BAR** 15:01.

7. See Alan Millard, "The Doorways of Solomon's Temple," *Eretz-Israel* 20 (1989), pp. 135*–139*.

8. David Ussishkin, *The Village of Silwan: The Necropolis from the Period of the Judean Kingdom* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993), illus. 47, 94, 108.

9. The association of temple and palace in one building compound has been well attested in Mesopotamia and Egypt. It proved to be a popular layout in the Levant as well, as noted by Ussishkin ("Solomon and the Tayanat Temples," *Israel Exploration Journal* (*IEJ*) 16 (1966), pp. 104–110; "Solomon's Palace and Building 1723," *IEJ* 16 [1966], pp. 174–186). In 1971 Theodor Busink published all known parallels in one monograph: *Der Tempel von Jerusalem von Salomo bis Herodes: Eine archäologische-historische Studie unter Berücksichtigung des westsemitischen Tempelhaus*, vol. 1, *Der Tempel Salomos* (Leiden: Brill, 1971). Despite the numerous similarities between the Biblical description and Canaanite and Syrian temples, he considered many of the features in the Jerusalem Temple to be Israelite innovations (p. 617)—a point on which we disagree.

10. Two seminal articles on this subject were written by David Ussishkin; see note 9. For earlier studies, see G. Ernest Wright, "The Significance of the Temple in the Ancient Near East," part 3, "The Temple in Syria-Palestine," *Biblical Archaeologist* (1944), pp. 65–77; Leroy Waterman, "The Damaged Blueprints of the Temple of Solomon," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (1943), pp. 284–294.

11. Mazar's typology is the most comprehensive proposed to date; see "Temples of the Middle and Late Bronze Ages and the Iron Age," in *The Architecture of Ancient Israel*, ed. Aharon Kempinski and Ronny Reich (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1992), pp. 161–187. See also Volkmar Fritz, "What Can Archaeology Tell Us About Solomon's Temple?" **BAR** 13:04. The temples range in date from the third to first millennium B.C.E. and include Munbaqa, Emar, Ebla D, Mari, Chuera, Hayyat, Kittan, ʻAin Dara, Tayinat, Ebla B1, N, Hazor Area A, Hazor Area H, Dabʻa, Alalakh I, Hamath, Shechem, Megiddo, Haror, Alalakh VII, IV, Byblos II, Carchemish, Lachish P, Beth-Shean VI and the *temenos* at Dan.

BAS/BAR and general notes (lettered)

a. See, for example, Volkmar Fritz, "What Can Archaeology Tell Us About Solomon's Temple?" **BAR** 13:04.

b. See the following **BAR** articles: Philip Davies, "What Separates a Minimalist from a Maximalist? Not Much," **BAR** 26:02, William Dever, "Save Us from Postmodern Malarkey," **BAR** 26:02, and Amihai Mazar and John Camp, "Will Tel Rehov Save the United Monarchy?" **BAR** 26:02; Amnon Ben-Tor, "Excavating Hazor—Part I: Solomon's City Rises from the Ashes," **BAR** 25:02; "David's Jerusalem: Fiction or Reality?": Margreet Steiner, "It's Not There—Archaeology Proves a Negative," **BAR** 24:04, Jane Cahill, "It Is There: The Archaeological Evidence Proves It," **BAR** 24:04, and Nadav Na'aman, "It Is There: Ancient Texts Prove It," **BAR** 24:04; and Hershel Shanks, "Where Is the Tenth Century?" **BAR** 24:02.

c. In the accompanying article in this issue, Lawrence Stager identifies the deity of ʻAin Dara as Baʻal-Hadad.

d. Orthostats are large stones—sometimes undecorated, sometimes bearing complex designs—that are free-standing or that line the lower part of the walls of temples or public buildings. Orthostats carved in the shape of lions or other animals may serve as the base of the doorjambs flanking the entryway to such buildings.

e. The most detailed description of Solomon's Temple appears in 1 Kings 6–7. The Book of Chronicles includes a parallel account (2 Chronicles 2–4), but this was written after the First Temple was destroyed. Other references are scattered throughout the Book of Kings and the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel (especially Ezekiel 40–46). For more on the Temple's design, see the following articles: Victor Hurowitz, "Inside Solomon's Temple," *Bible Review*, April 1994; Volkmar Fritz, "What Can Archaeology Tell Us About Solomon's Temple?" **BAR** 13:04; Ernest Marie-Laperrousaz, "King Solomon's Wall Still Supports the Temple Mount," **BAR** 13:03.

"David" Found at Dan

Endnotes (numbered)

1. See the following **BAR** articles: Avraham Biran, "Prize Find: Tel Dan Scepter Head," **BAR** 15:01; Hershel Shanks, "**BAR** Interview: Avraham Biran—Twenty Years of Digging at Tel Dan," **BAR** 13:04; John C. H. Laughlin, "The Remarkable Discoveries at Tel Dan," **BAR** 07:05.
2. From the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.
3. Avraham Biran and Joseph Naveh, "An Aramaic Stele Fragment from Tel Dan," *Israel Exploration Journal* 43 (1993), pp. 81–98.
4. See *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 100 (1968), pp. 42–44.
5. For a discussion, see Biran and Naveh, "An Aramaic Stele Fragment from Tel Dan," *Israel Exploration Journal* 43 (1993), pp. 95–98.

BAS/BAR and general notes (lettered)

a. The shortened form of Yahweh used in names in the southern kingdom, Judah, was -*yahu*.

b. For the gates and tomb, see John C. H. Laughlin, "The Remarkable Discoveries at Tel Dan," **BAR** 07:05; for the scepter head, see Avraham Biran, "Prize Find: Tel Dan Scepter Head," **BAR** 15:01. Also see Hershel Shanks, "**BAR** Interview: Avraham Biran—Twenty Years of Digging at Tel Dan," **BAR** 13:04.

c. See Joan G. Scheuer, "Volunteer's Report: Searching for the Phoenicians in Sardinia," **BAR** 16:01; and Edward Lipinski, "Epigraphy in Crisis—Dating Ancient Semitic Inscriptions," **BAR** 16:04.

Mosaic Masterpiece Dazzles Sepphoris Volunteers

BAS/BAR and general notes (lettered)

a. The Mishnah is a collection of Jewish legal traditions. It is the basic part of the Talmud.

Did Yahweh Have a Consort?

BAS/BAR and general notes (lettered)

a. A wadi is a very dry river bed which flows only one or two days each winter when it rains. Then the water flows with furious and dangerous intensity.b. The *w* which precedes the final word and two other words in the full transcription of the inscription is the particle which is translated "and."

c. An abecedary is an alphabet.

d. The Samaria ostraca are a collection of inscribed sherds found in excavations at Samaria, capital of the northern kingdom. The ostraca were commercial documents from about 800 B.C.E.

Has the House Where Jesus Stayed in Capernaum Been Found?

Endnotes (numbered)

1. Capernaum is the Latinization of the Hebrew Kfar Nahum which means the village of Nahum.
2. Tosephta.Megillah IV.23.

3. A sacristy is a room or building connected with a religious house, in which the sacred vessels, vestments, etc., are kept.
4. The Estrangelo alphabet is one of the most common of the Syriac alphabets. It probably first came into use in the first or second century C.E. and was most common in the third and fourth centuries C.E. Although its frequency then declined, it is still in use today.

5. See Cafarnao, Vol. IV (I graffiti della casa di S. Pietro) by Emmanuele Testa (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1972); and James F. Strange "The Capernaum and Herodium Publications, Part 2, " *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 233 (1979), pp. 68–69.

When Canaanites and Philistines Ruled Ashkelon

Endnotes (numbered)

1. Personal communication from Ephraim Stern, Professor of Archaeology, Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University.

2. See Brian Hesse, "Animal Use at Tel Mique-Ekron in the Bronze Age and Iron Age," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (*BASOR*) 264 (1986), pp. 17–27.

3. Marvin Harris, *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches: The Riddles of Culture* (New York: Random House/Vintage, 1975), pp. 35–57.

4. Trude Dothan, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1982); for their most recent statement, see Trude Dothan, "The Arrival of the Sea Peoples: Cultural Diversity in Early Iron Age Canaan," pp. 11–22, and Moshe Dothan "Archaeological Evidence for Movements of the Early 'Sea Peoples' in Canaan," pp. 59–70, both in *Recent Excavations in Israel: Studies in Iron Age Archaeology*, ed. Seymour Gitin and William G. Dever, Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research 49 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989).

5. We need not imagine, as some scholars once did, that non-Mycenaean motifs of Philistine bichrome ware were acquired during the peregrinations of the Philistines around the eastern Mediterranean (e.g., Cyprus and Egypt) before landing in Canaan. All of these sources of inspiration were right at hand in Canaan itself. Even bichrome decoration itself was known in Phoenicia during the 13th century B.C.E. and has been found at Ashkelon (this LB IIB bichrome should not be confused with the earlier LB I bichrome, which originated in Cyprus).

6. Lawrence E. Stager, "Merenptah, Israel and Sea Peoples: New Light on an Old Relief," *Eretz-Israel* 18 (1985), pp. 61–62.

7. See Stager, "Merenptah, Israel and Sea Peoples." Using other lines of reasoning, both Amihai Mazar ("The Emergence of the Philistine Material Culture," *Israel Exploration Journal* 35 [1985], pp. 95–107) and Itamar Singer ("The Beginning of Philistine Settlement in Canaan and the Northern Boundary of Philistia" *Tel Aviv* 12 [1985], pp. 109–122) reached similar conclusions.

8. F. Asaro, Isadore Perlman and Moshe Dothan, "An Introductory Study of Mycenaean IIIC:1 Ware from Tel Ashod," *Archaeometry* 13 (1971), pp. 169–175; Asaro and Perlman, "Provenience Studies of Mycenaean Pottery Employing Neutron Activation Analysis," in *The Mycenaeans in the Eastern Mediterranean, Acts of the International Archaeological Symposium* (Nicosia, Cyprus: Department of Antiquities, 1973), pp. 213–224; Jan Gunneweg, Trude Dothan, Perlman and Seymour Gitin, "On the Origin of Pottery from Tel Miqne-Ekron," *BASOR* 264 (1986), pp. 3–16.

9. See Stager, "Merenptah, Israel and Sea Peoples," p. 64, n. 37 for bibliography of sites through 1985.

10. See T. Dothan, "The Arrival of the Sea Peoples."

11. John A. Wilson, transl. in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (*ANET*), ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), p. 262.

12. Heinrich Schliemann, *Tiryns: The Prehistoric Palace of the Kings of Tiryns* (New York: Scribner's, 1885), pp. 146–147. For Kition, see Vassos Karageorghis and M. Demas, *Excavations at Kition: The Pre-Phoenecian Levels*, vol. V: Part 1 (Nicosia: Cyprus Dept. of Antiquities, 1985), for example, pl. 20:1087; pl. 34:1020, 1024; pl. 57:1024; pl. 117:5150–5156; pl. 195:5149–5156.

13. All references to Homer's *Odyssey* follow the translation of Richard Lattimore, *The Odyssey of Homer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

14. Stubbings, "The Recession of Mycenaean Civilization," *Cambridge Ancient History*, (*CAH*), eds. I.E.S. Edwards, C.J. Gadd, N.G.L. Hammond and E. Sollberger (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 3rd edition 1975), vol. II, part 2: *History of the Middle East and the Aegean Region c. 1380–1000 B.C.*, pp. 354–358.

15. Fritz Schachermeyr, *Griechische Fruhgeschichte: ein Versuch, fruhe Geschichte wenigstens in Umrissen verstandlich zu machen* (Vienna: Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1984), pp. 181–190.
16. Strabo, *The Geography*, XIV, 1.27.
17. Schachermeyr, *Griechische Fruhgeschichte*, pp. 183–185.
18. Richard D. Barnett, "The Sea Peoples," *CAH*, vol. II. part 2, pp. 363–365, and "Phrygia and the Peoples of Anatolia in the Iron Age," *CAH*, vol. II, part 2, pp. 441–442.
19. Amihai Mazar, *Excavations at Tell Qasile: Part One, The Philistine Sanctuary: Architecture and Cult Objects*, *Qedem* 12 (Jerusalem: Hebrew Univ. Press, 1980).
20. See citations and discussion in George Foote Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (International Critical Commentary) (New York: Scribner's, 1895), pp. 364–365.
21. Othniel Margalith, "Samson's Riddle and Samson's Magic Locks," *Vetus Testamentum* (*VT*), 36 (1986), pp. 225–234.
22. Yigael Yadin, "'And Dan, why did he remain in ships?'" *Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology* 1 (1968), pp. 9–23; Cyrus Gordon, "The Mediterranean Factor in the Old Testament," *VT*, Suppl. 9 (1962), pp. 19–31; Allen H. Jones, *Bronze Age Civilization: The Philistines and the Danites* (Public Affairs Press: Washington, D.C., 1975); and Hershel Shanks, "Danaans and Danites—Were the Hebrew Greek?" **BAR** 02:02.
23. See John A. Wilson, *ANET*, p. 28, for Wen-Amon, where Dor is called a "town of the Tjeker (=Sikil)." Recently Dr. Avner Raban, of the Center for Maritime Studies at Haifa University, has discovered the remains of the ancient harbor used by Wen-Amon in the 11th century B.C.E. at Dor (see Raban, "The Harbor of the Sea Peoples at Dor," *Biblical Archaeologist* 50 (1987), pp. 118–126.) The terrestrial archaeologist at Dor, Professor Ephraim Stern, considers the fortification system with glacis to have been built initially by the Sea Peoples, and specifically by the Sikils (personal communication). Shortly before the fall of Ugarit at the hands of the Sea Peoples, the Sikalayu, "who live on ships," were raiding and kidnapping along the coast, according to one Akkadian letter found at Ugarit (RS 34.129). Among the last tablets written there the last king of Ugarit despairs, saying: "The enemy ships are already here, they have set fire to my towns and have done very great damage in the country" (RS 20.238). These seafarers and pirates (the Sikalayu = "Sikils") later moved down the coast and settled in the region of Dor.

Several scholars misidentified the Sikalayu with the Sea Peoples group known as Shekelesh (e.g. G.A. Lehmann, "Die Sikalayu—ein neues Zeugnis zu den 'seevolker'—Heerfahrten im spaten 13 Jh. V. Chr. [RS 34. 129]," Ugarit Forschung 11 [1979], pp. 481–494).

Anson Rainey was the first scholar to identify correctly the Tjeker of Egyptian sources with the Sikalayu of Ugarit. The tj of Tjeker should be phoneticized s (samakh); and of course, Egyptian r can equal r or l in Semitic. The gentilic Sikalayu actually masks the ethnicon Sikil (see Rainey, "Toponymic Problems," Tel Aviv 9 [1982], p. 134; for the best interpretation of the text, see Gregory Mobley, "The Identity of the Sikalayu [RS 34.129]," BASOR [forthcoming]).

Thus the Sea Peoples, who established themselves at Dor in the early 12th century B.C.E.—namely, the Sikils—closely resemble the Sikelor of later Greek sources, the people who gave their name to Sicily, just as the Sherden, another group of Sea Peoples, bequeathed their name to Sardinia, and the Teresh/Tursha to first Tarsus and later to the Etruscans of Italy. According to the dispersal of proper names and the evidence of immigrant Mycenaeans, it would appear that during the "colonization" of the coastal Levant and Cyprus, fissiparous groups of Sea Peoples bearing the same ethnicons settled the coastal regions of the central Mediterranean and bequeathed their names to several peoples and places there.
24. Moshe Dothan, "Archaeological Evidence for Movements" and his "Sardine at Akko?" in *Studies in Sardinian Archaeology: Sardinia in the Mediterranean*, vol. 2, ed. Miriam Balmuth (Ann Arbor: Univ. Of Michigan Press, 1986), pp. 105–115.
25. Avraham Biran, "The Collared-rim Jars and the Settlement of the Tribe of Dan," in Gitin and Dever, *Recent Excavation*, pp. 71–96.

BAS/BAR and general notes (lettered)
a. Forged copper is heated, hammered and cooled until the desired shape is attained.

b. See Trude Dothan and Seymour Gitin, “Ekron of the Philistines, Part 1: Where They Came From, How They Settled Down and the Place They Worshiped In,” **BAR** 16:01 and “Ekron of the Philistines, Part 2: Olive-Oil Suppliers to the World” **BAR** 16:02, respectively.

c. See Neil Silberman, “Glossary: A Question of Defense,” **BAR** 15:03.

d. See Frank J. Yurco, “3,200-Year-Old Picture of Israelites Found in Egypt,” **BAR** 16:05.

e. Neutron activation analysis can detect some of the rarest elements present in pottery. By comparing the chemical “fingerprint” of the potsherd to that of various clay sources, it is often possible to determine the provenance of pottery. See Maureen F. Kaplan, “Using Neutron Activation Analysis to Establish the Provenance of Pottery,” **BAR** 02:01.

f. See translation of Ramesses III inscription, in which Alashiya is one of the countries overwhelmed by the Sea Peoples.

g. See photo in “Ekron of the Philistines, Part 1: Where They Came From, How They Settled Down and the Place They Worshiped In,” **BAR** 16:01.

h. See Lawrence E. Stager, “The Song of Deborah—Why Some Tribes Answered the Call and Others Did Not,” **BAR** 15:01.

Jerusalem in David and Solomon’s Time

Endnotes (numbered)

1. David Ussishkin, “Solomon’s Jerusalem: The Text and the Facts on the Ground,” in Andrew Vaughn and Ann Killebrew, eds. *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), p. 112.
2. Jane M. Cahill, “Jerusalem at the Time of the United Monarchy,” in Vaughn and Killebrew, eds. *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology*, pp. 13–80.
3. Israel Finkelstein, “The Rise of Jerusalem and Judah: The Missing Link,” in Vaughn and Killebrew, eds. *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology*, p. 81.
4. Donald T. Ariel and Yeshayahu Lender, “Area B: Stratigraphic Report,” in Ariel, ed., *Excavations at the City of David 1978–1985 Directed by Yigal Shiloh Volume V: Extramural Areas* (*Qedem* 40) (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology and Israel Exploration Society, 2000), pp. 1–32, esp. 4–7.
5. Donald T. Ariel, ed., *Excavations at the City of David*.
6. Yigal Shiloh, *Excavations at the City of David*, vol. 1 (*Qedem* 19), p. 25.
7. Kathleen Kenyon, *Digging Up Jerusalem* (New York: Praeger, 1974), p. 94.
8. Despite the fact that Jerusalem greatly expanded beyond the City of David in the latter part of Iron Age II, Iron Age II remains comparable to those found on the City of David’s eastern slope have not been preserved anywhere else in Jerusalem because all the other areas of the city experienced—and continue to experience—intense occupation in subsequent periods.

BAS/BAR and general notes (lettered)

a. Margreet Steiner, “It’s Not There: Archaeology Proves a Negative,” **BAR** 24:04.

b. “‘David’ Found at Dan,” **BAR** 20:02.

c. Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron, “Light at the End of the Tunnel,” **BA**R 25:01.

d. Nadav Na’aman, “It Is There: Ancient Texts Prove It,” **BAR** 24:04.

e. Margreet Steiner, “It’s Not There: Archaeology Proves a Negative.”